

We are talking about worship and our God who is worthy of it. And as I prepared this series I wondered if the church could use something like a worship manual, some “how to” guide so that we could all know how to worship appropriately. And if I was going to do that, I would assuredly include this wonderful and helpful piece by Tim Hawkins.

Tim shows us a variety of what he calls “worship signals”, and categorizes them by skill level: rookie, intermediate, pro, and expert. And a few of my favorite moves include the rookie move of “elbow flap”, the intermediate move of “hold my baby”, the pro move of “goalposts and heartburn” and, if you’re really advanced, the expert move of “touchdown”. Would that be helpful?

I’m not sure if that’s what the church needs, but I do believe we need a guide to show us or remind us how to worship. It’s vital that we know what true worship is. Perspectives on how we are to worship are prolific and it’s so easy for us to say we have it right and they have it wrong. I believe it is especially important for our church given the variety of backgrounds we come from, to value and learn from what each of us brings to this body, but also to consider how we might be limiting our worship. **The limitations we place on how we worship ultimately limit our relationship with whom we worship.**

The good news is that we do, in fact, have a worship guide. But it’s not a printed document or a workbook. It’s a person, and his name is Jesus. In this morning’s passage, we’re going to find him in the middle of a conversation with someone who needs a worship guide. She has placed significant limitations on her life of worship, and it has impeded her relationship with the one true God. And though the circumstances may be a little different, I believe it’s an opportunity for you and me to hear her story and ask God what limitations we’ve put on our own worship so that they can be undone and our relationship with God can flourish.

It may be a familiar story. In fact, Richard gave an excellent two-part message on it in April that you can go back and watch. It’s the story found in John 4 when Jesus is talking with the Samaritan woman at a well. If you know the story, Jesus asks her for a drink, which is a big deal because Jews don’t talk to Samaritans and men don’t talk to women. Jesus then told her that if she knew who she was talking to, she’d ask him for a drink because the water he gives is living and the satisfaction it gives is unending. He was speaking of salvation and gift of the Holy Spirit. She then asks Jesus for a drink of that living water, and that’s where we pick up the story in v16.

[John 4:16-26] ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The

woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Jesus gets her attention by confronting her with how she is living and showing her he has some special insight into the matters of her life. But her response is a dodge, a distraction to get him away from the conversation about her personal life and put it, instead, on the hotly debated topic of where people should worship. Jesus is happy to have that conversation with her because his ultimate desire is to make her a true worshipper herself, one who worships in spirit and in truth, and he'll do so by challenging her to undo the limitations she's placed on worship.

Worship offers what is stored in our head.

Jesus tells her the Samaritans worship what they do not know. They are a people who are part Jewish, descendants of the northern tribes who were intermarried to foreigners when the Assyrians conquered them. They believed in their version of the first five books of the Old Testament but rejected the rest and included pagan beliefs imported by foreigners. **Because their view of God was inadequate, so was their worship of him.**

You cannot worship what you do not know. We said last week that worship is the awed response to the character and works of God. If our understanding of the character and works of God is wrong, our response will follow suit. And, also like we said last week, if worship is ultimately a means to a relationship with God, if our worship is compromised, so is our relationship.

I had a conversation recently with someone about a mutual acquaintance we had, and it was clear I knew that person better than they did. You see, they were saying wonderful things about that person, glowing things about their character and kindness. The problem was none of it was true! It wasn't worship, but it was praise. But it was meaningless because it wasn't true, and it was evidence that a true relationship didn't exist.

And it's the same thing with our worship of God. You see, we could worship God every week as a God who is ok being fifth on our priority list, a God who will enrich us financially if we have enough faith, a God who votes Republican, a God who votes Democrat, saves people who reject him, considers Jesus one of many ways to himself, or a God who is only love and, therefore, ok with however we live our lives. None of those things are true, so if we respond in awe to those things, our worship isn't true either, and our relationship is based on falsehood.

So, then, what is truth? Well, our worship guide, Jesus, answers that question in two ways:

[John 14:6] ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

[John 17:17] ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

The truth is Jesus, called the Word by John, and the Word of God, our Bible. God reveals his true character and true works through the person of Jesus and the record of revelation found in his Word. If you want to grow deeper in your worship, grow in your understanding of who Jesus is. And the best way to do that is to grow in your understanding of his Word.

Can I tell you that's one of the reasons I'm so excited for this Training Experience to Israel? The Word of God will come alive, and I've never met a person who didn't know God more deeply when they came home.

Hebrews says, "**The Son is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.**" When we see Jesus, we see God. When we know Jesus, we know God. When we know Jesus, we can worship God.

But if it stays only in our head, it does us little good when it comes to worshipping God.

Worship offers what is stirred in our heart.

The woman asks Jesus which mountain is the right one to worship God. Her focus is on place and process, and it is a distraction from authentic worship. The more our heart is focused on what happens externally, the less we can express what is happening internally.

We may not operate in a sacrificial system like Israel or have a specific mountain from which we worship, but we all have motions we go through, a liturgy, a tradition in how we worship. It could involve going to church, singing, your daily routine with engaging God. If we are not careful, we can focus on the place or process of it instead of what is happening in our hearts.

Last week I was trying to spend some time with God and reading through Psalm 16. My eyes registered every word, and my pen jotted down some ideas in my journal. But God stopped me in my tracks and asked me where my heart was. I was present. I was doing the activity, but my spirit was far off. So I put down my Bible and journal and confessed to God what was going on and repented. My spirit was in that.

Worship is spiritual in every sense. The object of our worship is spirit, and it is thru his Holy Spirit and our spirit that he is worshiped. Remember last week, it is enabled by Holy Spirit.

[John 3:6] ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives our spirit life. He enables us to understand the truth of God, makes our spirit, our innermost being, the essence of who we are, sensitive and responsive to that truth, and as we are stirred, our affection for God pours out. Jesus says he gives water that becomes a spring of water welling up to eternal life, and part of what pours out of us when we have received that water is worship of God.

The place and process can be a vehicle for that, but worship is more than words and actions. Worship is an offering of our self from the deepest and most intimate part of who we are. A spiritually dead person can go to church, but he can't worship God. Jesus is saying what is most important is what is in us. God has no interest in our religious actions. He wants our hearts.

How does the God you worship compare to the God of the Bible?

Would it shock you to come to church and hear “read your Bible”? But know I don’t encourage that just so you can gain some more head knowledge. That’s why, whenever I say on a Sunday morning, “Go and do _____”, it’s almost always with the caveat that the exercise of it isn’t the point. The purpose of disciplined discovery is to bring you closer to God and to grow in your worship of him because you have grown in the truth of his character and works.

The good news is you don’t have to get to become a Bible scholar before you can worship. You may not be able to worship what you do not know, but you can worship whatever amount you do know, even if it’s just a little. Think of the woman at the well. How much better does she know God than before her talk with Jesus? In a sense, not much. But what she does know is that he is the Messiah, he knows all she’s done, but rather than condemn her, he tells her how she can worship. The message is clear. She can still have a relationship with God. And you know what she does right after? She worships by running to her village and telling everyone.

There are few more profound moments of worship than the person who knows just enough to know that they are separated from God by their sin, that God sent Jesus to die for them, and by trusting in him they can be made right with God and have eternal life. They may not know much else than that, but when they receive eternal life by trusting in Christ and have peace with God, their worship, based on the character of God and his actions to make their forgiveness possible, flows like spring!

Run hard after the truth of God and know that the God found in the Bible is greater than any other version we can come up with on our own.

What limitations in your worship need to be undone?

Where do you think worship begins and ends? What does an awed response to the character and works of God look like in your life?

For some of us here, particularly in a Bible church, the Bible has become a textbook and God has become a subject to master instead of a person to adore. We have given God all the headspace he may want, but there’s not much room in our hearts. Our worship is reserved. We hold back. We refuse to accept the cost of vulnerability. **And we are missing out.** Sometimes God’s people get loud and the glory and greatness and goodness of God is so overwhelming and moving that we can’t help but burst with worship. If that’s not you, what’s holding you back?

For others of us, our outward expression has become a substitute for inward movement. We may not be making sacrifices, but the expression of our worship has become more important than the object of our worship. We begin to see God as someone who wants us to be happy instead of a holy God who calls us to be the same. That causes us to struggle with coming to grips with our own rebellious heart and need for a savior. **And we are missing out.** Sometimes God’s people may get loud, but there are other times where they get small and quiet and reverent as they worship a holy God. If that’s not you, what’s holding you back?

Truth without spirit is lifeless, and spirit without truth is aimless. A discussion about worship is vital because it's a discussion about your relationship with God. Thankfully we have a worship guide who has shown us "how" to do it. But really, it's more than that. I believe we have a worship guide who **invites us to himself** so that we can have a thriving relationship with the Lord.