

The Discipline of Worship

By Scott Aniol

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

“Draw near” (sometimes translated “come”) is an important description of worship in the book of Hebrews. Look at all the occurrences of this phrase in the passages below. Be ready to describe what this phrase implies about worship. Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 10:1; 10:22; 11:6; and 12:22.

Assignment Two

Read Hebrews 12:18–24. This passage describes the difference between worship in the Old Testament and worship after the death and resurrection of Christ. Be ready to tell how these two ways of approaching God are different.

Assignment Three

Read Isaiah 6:1–4; Hebrews 12:22–24; and Revelation 4:1–11. Be ready to describe the worship of heaven.

Scripture to Memorize

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:22

Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the essence of worship as fellowship with God through Christ by faith.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Think about your times of worship at home, on Sunday or in other contexts. What do you expect from a worship service? What characterizes your favorite times of worship? How would you define the essence of what worship is?

The Essence of Worship

Read Hebrews 10:19–25 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 22. Draw near. This is the primary command of the text. It is a term that uniquely describes fellowship in the presence of God, and it is the essence of what it means to worship God.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now report on implications of “draw near” (sometimes translated “come”) in the book of Hebrews.

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to fellowship or commune with someone? What does it mean to fellowship with God? Why is this kind of fellowship impossible for sinners?

Studying the Passage

Verse 19. since. This text presents two reasons we can draw near to God in worship, and these reasons are introduced with this word. **confidence.** Literally, “free access.” Although sinners do not have the right to draw near to God, this verse tells us that believers do have access to Him. **holy places.** This term refers to the holy of holies in the temple, the place where God dwells and where only those who have access may draw near in worship. **blood of Jesus.** Access to communion in the presence of God is possible only through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.

Verse 20. new and living way. Literally, “freshly slaughter, yet living.” Jesus’ death and resurrection allow us access to God’s presence. **curtain . . . His flesh.** The veil in the holy of holies preventing sinners’ access to worship in God’s presence was torn in two when Jesus died (Matthew 27:51), as if the veil were the broken flesh of Christ.

Verse 21. great priest. The only person ever allowed in the holy of holies was the high priest and even then only once each year on the Day of Atonement. Since Jesus is our High Priest and since we are in Him (Ephesians 2:6), we are able to draw near to the presence of God in worship.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now report on how approaching the presence of God in worship is different now that Christ died on the cross, rose from the grave and ascended into heaven.

Discussion Questions

How does Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross enable us to fellowship with God in worship?
How is our situation different from those who drew near to God in the Old Testament?

Studying the Passage

Verse 22. true heart. God doesn't want worshipers who draw near out of duty or habit. **full assurance of faith.** Faith is the "conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is necessary for worship since we must trust in the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf and because we do not physically experience drawing near to the presence of God. Instead, we worship spiritually in the presence of God through Christ (Hebrews 12:22). **sprinkled clean . . . washed.** This is more language directly borrowed from Old Testament worship practices in order to emphasize the essence of worship through Christ. **evil conscience.** This phrase has the sense of condemning or guilty. Christ's sacrifice cleanses and forgives us as no animal sacrifice could and brings us into the presence of God Himself where we might have fellowship with Him.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now report on what the worship of heaven looks like.

Discussion Questions

Why is it so difficult for us to believe that when we draw near to God through Christ by faith, we are actually worshipping in the presence of God in heaven? How would fully recognizing this affect how we worship?

On Your Own

In the space below, write some implications of the fact that the essence of worship involves communion with God through Christ. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

The Essence of Communion with God

Read John 4:19–24 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 19. woman. A Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were shunned by the Jews.

Verse 20. mountain. The Samaritans had created their own system of worship on Mount Gerizim.

Verse 21. an hour is coming. Jesus' incarnation, life, death and resurrection initiated a shift in true worship from an emphasis on physical location and ritual to an emphasis on the true

essence of worship.

Verse 22. You . . . we. Jesus contrasts Jewish worship, which followed God's law, and Samaritan worship, which was created apart from God's instructions.

Verse 23. spirit. This word refers to the immaterial. Jesus is contrasting the essence of worship, which is immaterial, with the common physical emphasis of location and ritual that dominated thought about worship at the time. **truth.** This term refers to God's revelation.

Verse 24. spirit and truth. These two inseparable qualities of worship describe the essence of communion with God. Communion with God is hearing and understanding God's truth and responding to that truth with our spirits.

On Your Own

In the space below write two truths about God that are revealed in Scripture, and then list appropriate spiritual responses to those truths. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

Discussing and Applying the Passages

Based on Hebrews 10:19–22 and John 4:19–24, how does worship form and grow our relationship with God? How is the relationship between worship and salvation significant for spiritual formation?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Christian worship is tied directly to our relationship with God through Christ. Sinners have no right to draw near to God in worship (Hebrews 10:1), but because of the blood of Christ and His high priestly ministry on our behalf (Hebrews 10:19–21), we are able to draw near spiritually to the presence of God in heaven, where we can fellowship with Him.

God does not “come down” to us when we worship. Rather, in Christ (Ephesians 2:6), we ascend to the heavenly holy of holies, where we join with the angels and saints in praise and adoration of God (Hebrews 12:22–24).

When we worship, we must do so in faith (Hebrews 10:22; 11:6), believing that we worship on the merits of Jesus Christ alone. We are confident that when we draw near to God as He has commanded, we are spiritually in His presence even though we may not experience it (yet!) with our physical senses.

This worship through Christ is characterized by communion. It is fellowship with God as we respond with our spirits to truth about God (John 4:24). This magnifies God, brings glory to Him, and forms us into people who live each day in light of our salvation and relationship with Christ.

This has many implications for how we should approach worship. When we worship, we should give focused attention to biblical truth. Only when we understand God’s truth can we worship. We should give careful thought to what kinds of spiritual responses are appropriate to the truth. And through Christ we can rejoice that we now have free access to draw near to communion in the presence of God Himself.

Follow up Question

What is the essence of Christian worship?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.