

Steps to Worship



Thanksgiving, Praise, and Worship (Part 13)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we follow through our theme for this week, the theme of worship.

In my two previous talks this week I've described the essential nature and conditions of worship.

By definition, worship is an attitude in God's presence. The various words used in scripture for worship indicate various different but related attitudes.

(1) First of all, to bow the head or upper body, often accompanied by stretching out the hands with the palms upward.

(2) Secondly, to kneel, to bend the knee.

(3) And thirdly, to fall prostrate, face down.

However, true worship goes beyond the external and requires an inner attitude of the heart. Jesus described this inner attitude by the words "in spirit and in truth." These words indicate two things:

(1) First, it is only the regenerated spirit of man that can relate directly in worship to God, who is Himself, Spirit.

(2) Second, man must approach God in total openness and sincerity; that's "in truth."

Today I'm going to deal with the steps to worship. I'm going to explain in a simple, practical way just how we can enter into worship. This will bring out a very direct and practical relationship between worship and the themes that we've been studying during the two preceding weeks; that is, thanksgiving and praise. We shall see that thanksgiving and praise are the prelude to worship.

There's a very clear and beautiful picture of this presented in Psalm 95, a picture of the steps that bring us into worship and of the results that follow from worship. I'll begin by reading the first seven verses of Psalm 95:

> "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our Salvation. Let us come before

> him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land. Come let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care."

I see there three successive phases which I want to point out to you. First of all, in verses 1 and 2 we have loud exuberant praise and thanksgiving. It says "let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our Salvation. Let us come before Him with thanksgiving. Extol him with music and song." That's loud, exuberant praise and thanksgiving. That is, as it were, the prelude.

Then in verses 3 through 5, the psalmist gives us reasons for praise and thanksgiving. And you may remember that I said earlier, essentially we thank God for what He does. We praise Him for who He is. And reasons of both kinds are given in these verses. "The Lord is the great God." Elsewhere it says in the Psalms, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised." His praise must be related to His greatness.

And then it says "The sea is His. He made it. His hands formed the dry land." Those are the things that God did.

When we come to God in this way, with praise and thanksgiving, our vision becomes focused on God and at the same time enlarged, which is essential for worship because the great enemy to worship is self-centeredness. As long as we're all wrapped up in ourselves and our own problems and the things that are going on all around about us, we're not in a condition to worship God.

Then the third phase that issues out of this is in verses 6 and 7 of that Psalm 95 where worship is expressed in attitude. As I've already said:

> "Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker."

And I want to point out two things there that come of those verses. First of all, worship sets us apart as God's people. The reason given for worshipping is, "for He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture." It's when we worship God that we declare by that act who is our God. The one whom we worship necessarily and inevitably must be our God. That's why it's so important that we worship Him and that we worship no other as I'll point out later in this week. But just accept that point here, that worship sets us apart as God's people.

Secondly, worship is our appropriate response to God's tender love and care for us. The reason given is:

> "We are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care."

So, when we worship God, that sets us apart to God as His people and it's our appropriate response to His tender care for us.

Now I want to continue with the second part of Psalm 95, which I believe describes the results of worship and also the results of failing to worship. I'm going to read verses 7-11 and then comment on them.

> "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribach, as you did that day as Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested Me and tried Me though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known My way. So I declared an oath in my anger, They shall never enter my rest."

We see there two results of true worship, of bowing down and kneeling in the Lord's presence. First of all, it's hearing God's voice. You see, we pass from that stage of loud, exuberant praise and thanksgiving into a stage of inner rest, tranquility, quietness, where everything is hushed, where we're still in the presence of God. And then, in that attitude of worship we can hear God's voice in a way that we can never hear it while we're taken up with ourselves and our own problems and perplexities. You see, one of the essential things of worship is focusing on the Lord, turning away from ourselves, as it were, almost merging our identity in the Lord.

The second result which I really have already indicated is entering into God's rest. Worshipping and hearing God's voice brings us into a rest which is not possible in any other way.

Now, Israel as a people really failed to accept God's call to worship. And I want to point out to you the results of their failure as they're stated in that Psalm, just to point them out very briefly.

First of all, their hearts were hardened and it's desperately important to understand that if we don't learn to worship, our

hearts are liable to become hardened.

Secondly, they did not hear God's voice.

Thirdly, they provoked God to anger.

And fourthly, they did not enter into their appointed rest.

So you see how important it is that we follow these appointed steps, praise and thanksgiving, that lead us into bowing and kneeling down, an attitude of stillness, of hushed reverent quietness before God in which we hear His voice and through which we enter into our appointed rest.

To close this talk today I'd like to take an example from Elijah. This is in 1 Kings 19. Elijah had been running away from Jezebel. He's taken refuge in the desert and then he'd made a long journey to Mt. Horeb, the place where God originally made his covenant with the children of Israel. And when he was on Mt. Horeb, the Lord spoke to him and he went through a number of dramatic experiences and had a fresh revelation of the Lord. I want to read this, 1 Kings 19:11-13:

> "The Lord said [to Elijah], Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire."

That's what I call the prelude to worship: the wind, the earthquake, the fire. Tremendous, tumultuous noise and excitement but it's not worship.

> "And after the fire came a gentle whisper."

The Amplified Bible says "a sound of gentle stillness." That's what I want you to associate with worship, that sound of gentle stillness.

> "When Elijah heard it [this gentle whisper] he pulled his cloak over his face."

What's that? That's worship. Just like the seraphs that covered their face and their feet with their wings. In the presence of God, Elijah covered his own face.

> "He pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, What are you doing here, Elijah?"

You see, he heard the voice of God. He'd come into that place of stillness and reverence in God's presence where God could speak to him. So just note those points, think about them. The cloak over the face, that's worship. In that attitude Elijah heard God's whisper which he couldn't hear in any other way. And, through hearing God's voice, if you read the account that follows, he received new direction and strength. He went out a man renewed with a new purpose, new faith, new courage. He had entered into his rest through worship.

Well, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you tomorrow again at this time.

Tomorrow I'll continue with this theme of worship. I'll be illustrating the way we approach God in worship from a very vivid Old Testament pattern, the pattern of the tabernacle.

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Transcript: TS-R034-103-ENG
Last Updated: 13 Apr 2023
Website: derekprince.com

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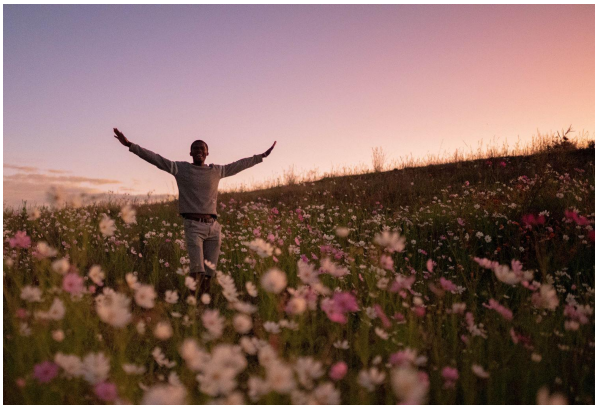

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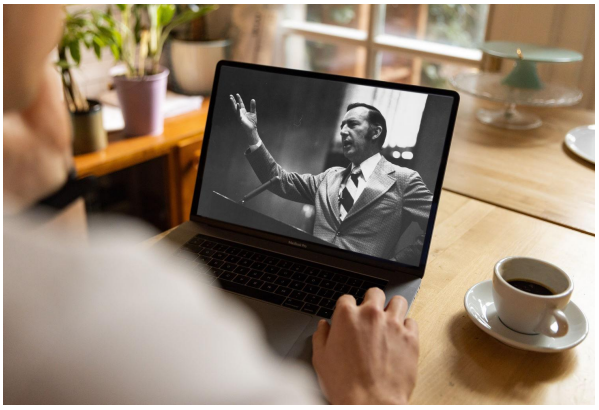

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