

# WORSHIP



PHIL  
SANDERS

# PROGRAMS

April 2017

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **APR 2 - PREPARE FOR WORSHIP**

Worship is an intentional act of the heart, but many people take little time to prepare for worship. God expects us not only to prepare our hearts but also our lives when we come into His presence. How do we prepare for worship?

## **APR 9 - THE NATURE OF WORSHIP**

Many people go to worship each Sunday, but do they understand what they are doing and Whom they are worshipping? Some churches have turned their worship into musical productions. What does God desire in our worship?

## **APR 16 - PROBLEMS IN WORSHIP**

How God sees our worship and how we see our worship may differ greatly. Things we may like are sometimes problems to God. God does not accept all that people call worship. He asks that we honor Him by how we worship.

## **APR 23 - WORSHIP IN SONG**

Music is one of the most powerful influences in life. God desires our worship in song to glorify Him in spirit and in truth. How we worship God in song matters to God, and it should matter to us.

## **APR 30 - WORSHIP IN PRAYER**

Prayer is man's great opportunity to pour out his heart to God the Father. In this lesson we'll explore ways to make our prayer lives more meaningful.

## Prepare for Worship

Worship is an intentional act of the heart, but many people take little time to prepare for worship. God expects us not only to prepare our hearts but also our lives when we come into His presence. How do we prepare for worship?

The English word “worship” comes from an old word “worthship”! It’s by our attitude, our words, and our actions that we tell God that He is worthy of our praise and adoration. He deserves our love and thanksgiving. Worship is not an experience that we have in the presence of God, but the act of offering God our best when we are in his presence.

Worship is a spiritual act that entails a sense of awe and reverence in the presence of the DIVINE. Worship comes from the Greek word *proskuneo*, which means, “throwing oneself on the ground to show respect and awe.” When Moses saw the burning bush, he thought it was a marvelous sight. He wanted to know why the bush didn’t burn up. God called him from the bush and told Moses, “Take your shoes off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). When we come into the presence of God for worship, we are entering holy ground.

The Bible says, “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29). Worship is, by its very nature, an act of reverence and awe. It focuses on honoring and pleasing God. Worship that pleases God requires some preparation. Today we’re going to explore the Scriptures to see how we can show God reverence and awe.

Our reading today comes from the book of Revelation 5:11-14. “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’ And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshiped.” What a beautiful scene.

What are we doing when we gather for worship? What does it mean to worship and praise God? If we’re to prepare for worship, we must know something about worship and about God. As we begin this lesson, let’s explore what worship is all about. First, worship is internal; it comes from the heart. One can worship internally without doing anything externally, but one cannot worship externally without doing something internally.

Zechariah 7:5-6 says that the Jews of Zechariah’s day feasted and fasted for themselves and not for God. They went through the motions but didn’t involve the heart. William Temple rightly said, “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

Our worship must come genuinely from our hearts. In a discussion with the woman at the well, Jesus said, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is

spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24). God isn't seeking worshipers who have their minds elsewhere or are simply going through the motions; He is seeking worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Second, worship is intentional. We don't worship God accidentally; it must be an intended act. Perhaps you remember Naaman the leper, whom God healed through Elisha. Naaman said that he would only worship the Lord God. In 2 Kings 5:17-19, Naaman was worried and told Elisha that he had to bow in the house of Rimmon to another god as a part of his duties. Naaman makes the point that he must bow, but that worshiping a false god is not his intention. Elisha understood that unless you intend to worship, it's not really worship. Unfortunately, some Christians come to church to socialize or to see a production; and they never intend to worship. I hope you're a true worshiper.

True praise is not merely “going through the motions.” Jesus spoke about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees whose worship was only an outward show and not from the heart. The Lord said, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8). This not only revealed itself in their worship, but also showed in their lives. They had forgotten God's commandments, but concentrated on their human traditions. The Lord said, “in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Genuine praise to God comes from a sincere devotion and obedience to the Lord.

Third, worship is vertical. Yes, true worship will edify the church; but the primary purpose of worship is vertical. Worship takes place when our hearts and spirits show our thanksgiving and praise to God, our Father. We sing praises to God. We're not worshiping to please ourselves but to adore and glorify God. While we may sing to edify or teach others, the primary focus is to praise God. The Bible says, “Through Him (that is, through Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15).

Fourth, worship is momentary. Like eating, it has a beginning and an ending. While worship is something that we do throughout our lives; it is an intermittent, heartfelt, occasional act, wherein we put everything else aside and we focus our minds and our hearts for a time on God. Someone says, “Phil, the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that we're to ‘pray without ceasing.’” That's true, but nobody can pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week. What this passage is saying is that we ought never to quit praying to God. We should pray every day throughout our lives.

Our lives are spent in momentary acts; and since worship is intentional, we must choose to spend our time in worship. We must make the moments we worship our Father important. Jesus said, “the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24). God wants you to give Him your heart and glorify His name.

Have you considered how important God regards worship? The Lord said to Israel through the prophet Malachi, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ God answers, ‘You are presenting defiled food upon My altar.’ But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is to be despised.’ ‘But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it

not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts. But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 1:6-9).

It's common these days for Christians to come to worship habitually late, and sometimes dressed as if they didn't know they were coming into the presence of God. How does this show respect and awe for God? Some think, "God ought to be glad I came. Chill out! God ought to be satisfied he got anything from me at all." Is this the attitude of true worship? Where is the love? Where is the humility? Where is the reverence and awe? How is God honored in all of this?

I fear some have little sense of holiness about coming into the presence of God. God deserves our best; we shouldn't give God what is common or profane or leftover. God deserves respect in our hearts and in our appearance. I'm not here trying to make laws or tell you what you must wear to worship, but to encourage you to consider whether you have honored God in your worship.

In the tabernacle and the temple, how one appeared before God mattered. The Bible says, "And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty" (Exodus 28:2). How the priest dressed mattered to God. Psalm 29:1-2 says, "Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness." The New American Standard says the angels are to worship "in holy array." Why would angels need to put on holy garments?

Consider Paul's instructions to Timothy, "that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works" (1 Timothy 2:9-10). When we assemble to worship, we're coming into the presence of God. What we do there, gathered in His name for worship, is holy and reveals our respect for Him.

When the Israelites gathered for worship at the temple, they didn't simply show up. They lived in a world of ceremonially clean and unclean. We have little sense of that concept today. Israelite pilgrims who traveled to a feast in Jerusalem in ancient times first went to a ritual bath to become ceremonially pure before they ever entered the temple area (John 11:55). In fact, archaeologists count as many as eighteen ritual baths surrounding the temple mount today. These purification rituals stressed cleanliness and worthiness to serve and worship the Lord. In fact, Jehoiada, the priest, "stationed gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the LORD so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean" (2 Chronicles 23:19).

Isaiah spoke of his experience in the presence of God in the year that King Uzziah died in Isaiah 6:1-8. Seraphim proclaimed, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" The Lord was sitting on his throne, lofty and exalted. The foundations of the thresholds trembled at his voice, while the temple was filling with smoke. Isaiah responded, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Isaiah was humbled by his own sense of uncleanness before God. He expected to die because he was unclean, but God forgave him as the Seraphim touched his lips with the burning coal.

When the apostle John came into the presence of the Lord Jesus on the island of Patmos,

he fell at his feet as though dead. He understood the awesome and special nature of the occasion. Many worship assemblies have become so worldly there is little sense of being in the presence of God or of the reverence of the occasion. The Hebrew writer urged his readers, "let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). I fear we have lost a sense of the awesome nature of God.

In many worship occasions, I find things that reflect an environment of little respect for God. I see things like putting a Bible on the floor, people putting their feet up in the pew or on song racks, people who are repeatedly and needlessly late, constant going in and out to get a drink or go to the bathroom, constant talking in the foyer, constant talking in the pews, texting on the phone, passing notes in worship, or clipping fingernails during the sermon. Yes, I care about everyone, and I want everyone to come for worship; but I wonder if God feels honored when our hearts and lives are so far from Him.

We also must think of our lives as we approach God in worship. The Bible says, "Come and hear, all of you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!" (Psalm 66:16-20). When people cherish sin more than they do God, it should not surprise them that God closes His ears to their prayers.

The New Testament says, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:26-27). If we wish to worship God in private or in public, we need to serve God by living holy lives every single day. The apostle Paul was concerned about the unruly assemblies at Corinth that kept the people from worshipping properly and from taking the Lord's Supper in a way that pleased God. He said, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

When we worship, we ought to please God and we need to do this for two reasons. First, it honors God to worship the way that He desires. Second, true worship calls us to live a purer and nobler life. Let's prepare to praise and glorify God before we come into His presence. Let's get our hearts and minds focused on God. Israel worshiped in vain by living immoral and ungodly lives according to Isaiah 1:12-20. They needed to repent of their sins before they came to worship God. What will please God most is a heart that is right with Him! Is your heart right with God?

To get right with God, one must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He must regard Jesus as Lord and turn away from sin in repentance. Anyone who loves the Lord will not remain in willful sin. He wants to change his life and to confess Jesus as the Christ. He'll also be baptized as quickly as possible for the forgiveness of his sins—as the Bible teaches in Acts 2:38. If a person loves the Lord, he won't want to spend a single moment outside the love and grace of God.

## The Nature of Worship

Many worship each Sunday, but do they understand what they're doing? Some churches have forgotten God and turned their worship into musical productions. What does God desire in worship? The Bible gives us God's standard of truth. We want to practice the truth so we search the Scriptures.

When churches assemble to worship, God is present with His people. The Lord Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). What do you think about being in the presence of God? Right now, what if you found yourself in the very presence of God? Perhaps it is frightening. Revelation 1:17 says John fell at the Lord's feet "as though dead." Perhaps it's exciting. Perhaps it alarms your conscience to be in God's presence. You may be thinking like Isaiah of the sins of your life and realize that God knows all about them. Perhaps God's presence is comforting, reassuring in the midst of your storms. Perhaps being with God makes you want to say "thank you."

Worship is a spiritual matter; and true worship exhibits a sense of awe and reverence in the presence of the DIVINE. The word "worship" (*proskuneo*) means "throwing oneself on the ground to show respect and awe." Many Christians today have little sense of the difference between what is holy and what is common. God has always expected to be treated as holy in worship.

Some people think God ought to be happy and thankful that He received any worship from us at all. People who act like that forget the grandeur and the majesty of our great God who created us. God isn't obligated to us; we are completely dependent on Him for life, for salvation, and for our future.

Our reading today comes from a psalm of David, Psalm 103:1-5. "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with loving kindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, *So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle."

We must take the holiness of God seriously. To be holy means that one is separate or set apart from others. To be holy means to be set apart for a special and higher purpose. Something that is holy is special in that it has no contamination. We must never treat what is holy as if it were something common. God is not just holy; He is utterly holy. He is worthy of reverence, of awe, and of adoration. For instance, the Lord's name is so holy that one must never take it in vain.

Holiness requires the absence of evil and the presence of righteousness. God's holiness means that He is absolutely pure in being and in nature. He is completely pure and righteous in His will and in His acts. Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil; and, upon the other, absolute moral perfection. The God of the Bible is utterly holy—He sets the standard for morality. Unlike the Roman and Greek gods, He's not warlike, adulterous, or spiteful. Unlike the gods of the pagan cults that were popular in the first century, the God of the Bible is not bloodthirsty or promiscuous. He is the one and only God of mercy and justice who cares personally for His followers.

First John 1:5 says, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." There's nothing impure or common about God. Habakkuk 1:13 says about God, "*Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness *with favor*." Our God, whom we worship and serve, is holy. He is sacred, not common; pure and clean. We can never treat Him as if he were human, or weak, or flawed. He is holy and perfect, far above us!

Isaiah describes what it's like to come into the presence of a holy and awesome God, "In the

year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I'm a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts'" (Isaiah 6:1-5).

How we approach God in worship matters greatly. We should not presume that God will accept whatever we have to offer. God distinguishes between what He desires and what man dreams up. Just because someone calls something an act of worship does not mean that God accepts it. What men think is worship may not be what God regards as worship.

To worship God acceptably, we must ask God what He requires for worship. True worship always thinks of pleasing the One Whom we worship. Only God can determine what acceptable worship is. After all, He is God and He's the One that we're worshipping. Shouldn't He have a say in how we worship?

The Bible says: "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange (or unauthorized) fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored'" (Leviticus 10:1-3). This event is in the Scriptures, so that we might learn from it.

Nadab and Abihu were the sons of Aaron, the nephews of Moses. For several days before this incident, they had participated in their own consecration and the consecration of the tabernacle with many sacrifices. Leviticus chapters eight and nine tell of this beginning of Israel's worship in the tabernacle. Ten times Moses had given them instructions, telling them what the Lord commanded them to do. They did just as the Lord commanded until they decided to act on their own authority. Carelessness didn't excuse Nadab and Abihu; hearts wanting to praise the Lord didn't excuse them from going beyond the authorized commands. They acted on their own and paid a very dear price. They presumptuously took their firepans and placed incense in them. Then they went to an unauthorized place to get "strange" fire for their incense. It was unauthorized fire, illegitimate fire. They offered up something other than what God had instructed. They offered it spontaneously in response to the glory of the Lord coming down. The Lord didn't command them to do this and didn't give them permission to use "strange" fire. God punished them for acting on their own authority. God has never accepted worship that ignores what God's instructions are, but does what some man invents. People sometimes forget God's desires; they turn their attention to what people like and what they want.

The Lord Jesus in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 clearly condemned using the traditions of men. The Lord said that when people follow the traditions of men, they transgress the commandments of God. Now according to their tradition, they were taking the money that should go to support their elderly parents and declaring it "Corban" or devoted to God. By pronouncing this money Corban, the Pharisees could use this money selfishly in worship, so they would look good.

In Matthew 15:6-9, the Lord said, "So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This



people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

When people act on their own, they show that their hearts are not right with God, because they haven't listened to Him. Listening to men rather than listening to God makes our worship vain. Why? Because in listening to the teachings of men, we stop listening to God. We treat God as less than men. We haven't given Him the holy place in our hearts that He deserves.

In Colossians 2:20-23 the Bible says, “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with the use)—and it's in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? And he says these are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

“Self-made” religion happens when people act on their own authority and do not obey what God teaches. God doesn't permit “self-made” religion, because it fails to show Him the reverence that He deserves. Now it may appear to have value to people, but God detests it. People may enjoy what they call worship; they may think it draws a great crowd; but forms of worship that ignore God's teaching and originates in the mind of men violate God's will. True worship to God always comes from listening to the teaching of God.

God wants all His people to worship Him and praise His name. He seeks for true worshipers. Now true worshipers worship Him in spirit and in truth. The New Testament has no special class of worshipers such as the Levites under the old covenant. According to 1 Peter 2 and verse 5 all Christians are members of a holy priesthood and their place is “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The churches in the New Testament did not have choirs or special music. They all sang from their hearts as a congregation. To worship means "to adore or to pay divine honors as to a deity; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration. They did not fall for the notion that worship was for them. Worship was how they gave of themselves to God rather than what they received from the people around them. They didn't think of themselves as an audience or spectators. They came to worship, not to see a performance.

Early churches didn't have theatrical performances, light shows, or bands. They didn't hire professional musicians to perform for them. There's a difference between worship that comes from the hearts and lips of everyone in the pews and a performance that comes from professionals on the stage. The Bible says in Hebrews 13:15, “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” God doesn't choose the musically talented for worship but exclude everyone else.

To worship is to revere God; but to entertain means "to engage the attention with anything that causes the time to pass pleasantly; or to amuse." Entertainment is "an interesting or amusing thing, as a show or performance." Now entertainment in and of itself is not sinful. But God never intended for entertainment or a performance to replace the worship of the church. The purpose of worship is to glorify God, and in many places what some call worship focuses not on God but on the performer or performers.

Some churches today contain very little worship to God and a great deal of show to attract a crowd. Performers become religious “stars.” We now have an entire entertainment industry

devoted to Christian praise music. Why have Christians made a commercial enterprise out of worship? Why have we focused on the talent of the performer, glorifying people rather than glorifying God?

Worship is an expression of reverence and adoration toward God. Worship is our response to a gracious and holy God, and it needs to be placed in this context if it is to be properly understood. It is right to remind ourselves in church that we are not the audience. God is! He is there to receive our praise and adoration. We have met there to honor Him. And our task is to “please Him.” This is why we can never, never, never cheapen our worship by turning it into entertainment. We must glorify God and Him alone.

Some folks don't find any value in Biblical worship; they prefer something more exciting or appealing. They think worship should be for their benefit; and so they come to worship to “get” rather than to “give.” There are certainly many things in church that bless our lives; but we get out of worship what we put into it. One man endures worship and leaves bored and empty, while another leaves blessed and refreshed by the experience.

Why? The man who leaves empty has his mind on himself, while the man who leaves blessed has concentrated on God. He's taken time to count his blessings, to remember the cross, to meditate on what God has done, and to be thankful. He can see the value of singing songs of praise. He values speaking to God in prayer. He grows spiritually by remembering Christ in the Lord's Supper. He cheerfully gives of his means! He loves to hear God's counsel in the Word, because he loves God. Love makes the difference. Worship is declaring our love, our praise, our adoration, our thanksgiving, and our commitment to our gracious God in heaven. What a pleasure it is to praise Him. Before we worship, let's prepare our hearts and spirits to praise and glorify our God. Let's enter worship with praise and thanksgiving. In worship let's devote ourselves to God with loving hearts. When we leave worship, let's show Him we love Him by living holy lives. The Bible says, “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29).

God seeks people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. God seeks for you to make your heart right with Him. We truly worship when we revere the right Person, doing the right thing with the right heart. Does the worship where you go to church please God? Is that worship according to the teaching of Scripture or does it involve the traditions of men?

Is your heart right with God? To get your heart right, you must approach God in faith and love. You must be willing to obey Him in all things. You must be willing to repent. This is to give up what is sinful and human and to embrace what is Divine and what is true to God's will. With your faith, love, and repentance, you must be willing to confess Christ as the Son of God and to be baptized. Baptism is the time when the blood of Jesus Christ washes away your sins according to Acts 22:16.

When you're baptized, the Lord causes you to be born again into the family of God. He forgives you, adds you to His church, and gives you eternal life. Such blessing ought to make you want to worship and praise Him all the days of your life. Please attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in your area. They strive to worship according to the teaching of God. They focus on worship, not performing; and they want everyone to participate. They would love for you to worship with them in spirit and in truth.

## Problems in Worship

How God sees our worship and how we see our worship may differ greatly. God doesn't accept all that people call worship. He asks that we honor Him by how we worship. The Bible always teaches us the heart and the mind of God. It teaches us how to please Him. That's why we go to God's Word for the truth.

In worship, we express our thanks, our love, and our praise for God. Our Father has richly blessed us; and how could we not want to worship Him? What we offer to God should honor and glorify Him. God wants worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Sometimes people offer God worship that actually offends, worship that He will not accept. Some people are surprised that God would reject their worship. They think God will be pleased no matter what we offer, but the Bible tells of several instances where God rejected the worship of His people.

If we should learn that our worship is not acceptable to God, what should we do? Should we get angry? Should we stop worshiping the God of Heaven and start worshiping another god, or a god of our own making? Should we close our ears to the teaching of the Scripture and convince ourselves that it doesn't matter? Should we go and find someone who will agree with us? Who will tell us what we want to hear?

Let's stop a moment. Wouldn't it be better for us to listen to God? Wouldn't it be wise to take God's instructions in the Bible to heart and humble ourselves? If we're not pleasing to the Lord, we should humbly change our ways. Let's lovingly obey so that we may honor the Lord. Today, we're going to examine the Scriptures. We're going to see how others have worshiped God in unacceptable ways and learn how we can please God in our worship.

Our reading comes from the first book in the Bible, Genesis 4:1-5. "Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with *the help of the LORD.*' Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell."

Genesis 4 presents the very first example of worship in the Bible. The two brothers, Cain and Abel, both came before the Lord with their different gifts. We don't know exactly what God required of them in their sacrifices. The Bible says, "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground." We know that Cain tilled the ground and brought some of its produce. We do not know if his offering contained his best fruit or his first fruit. The text suggests that he was just discharging a duty.

"Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions." Abel brought the first and the best of his flock. Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks." Abel apparently showed a faith in God that Cain did not show. Abel went out of his way to please God. As a result, God regarded Abel as righteous, because he offered an acceptable sacrifice.

The next verse says, "And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain

and for his offering He had no regard.” Did you catch that? God did not have regard for Cain or for his offering. There was something lacking in Cain's faith. We learn from 1 John 3:12 that Cain's deeds were evil, referring to his life, his offering, and his attitude. God made a distinction between an offering from a righteous and faithful man who wanted to please and an offering that was merely a discharge of duty.

When God did not accept Cain's sacrifice, Cain got angry and eventually killed his brother, Abel, over it. When people learn they have failed to live up to God's expectations, rather than getting upset they should repent and change their ways. No one likes to hear they have failed, but Cain's life would have been so much better if he had changed his ways.

In Exodus 32, the Bible tells of the rebellious Israelites who gave up on the Lord and Moses and demanded idols. Aaron took their gold rings and made an idol in the form of a golden calf. They said the golden calf they fashioned was the god who brought them out of Egypt. The next day they called a feast to the Lord. They sacrificed offerings; they sat down to eat and drink; and they rose up to play. They behaved like the idolatrous nations around them with drunken dancing filled with sensuality. Idolatrous worship often ended up in sexually immoral behavior. They rose up to play, and they thought playing was worship.

Ancient idolaters thought that their drinking and immoral dance was worship; and the Israelites said the calf that they made was the Lord. But they were wrong on both accounts, and the Lord grew angry at them. My friend, you cannot be on the Lord's side and worship the way they did. You cannot serve a holy God with impure behavior.

What they thought was worship was really a great sin. In 1 Corinthians 10:6-7, the Bible says, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; and as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’” We must learn that only acceptable worship to the true and living God is right.

In Isaiah the prophet's day, the people thought they could worship God acceptably while they willfully lived wicked lives. God wearied of their sacrifices and their feasts because of their iniquity. The Lord said, “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; because your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, and learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause” (Isaiah 1:15-17).

Because they chose to live ungodly lives, God would not hear their prayers. I realize none of us can live a perfectly sinless life. You can't and I can't. God desires that when we do sin, however, that we repent of our sins and humbly ask for forgiveness. David, after his sin, wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). But if we approach God unbroken and impenitent, how can we imagine that God will accept us?

As we turn to the New Testament, we find other problems with worship. The Lord Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, devotes eighteen verses to the problem of displaying righteousness to be seen by others. Jesus said, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). He described this behavior as hypocrisy. Hypocrisy takes place when a person pretends to be something that he doesn't intend to be. People were pretending to worship, but in God's eyes they were only showing off their righteousness.

The Lord applies this principle to three acts of devotion: giving alms, praying, and fasting. The hypocrites would blow a trumpet before the people to call attention to their gifts. They weren't giving to God; they were showing off. The Lord teaches us, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:3-4).

The people also proved themselves hypocrites in their prayers. Hypocrites "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, you go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:5-6).

Third, when the hypocrites fasted they, put on gloomy faces and neglected their appearance, "so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I (Jesus) say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and you're Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:16-18).

In Jesus' time, the Pharisees and others were tempted by the flesh to make a show out of their worship. I fear the same kind of thing is happening today. When people become enamored with Christian music stars, they have taken their eyes off of God. Even some preachers believe their calling is to promote a health and wealth gospel. They promise blessings that have nothing to do with discipleship to Christ and everything to do with the crass materialism of our day. Other preachers believe their calling is to be stand-up comedians, using the pulpit for their stage. This is not the Lord's way.

Paul told Timothy, "I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:1-2). It is the Word, the gospel, that saves (Romans 1:16). It is the Word of Christ that brings faith (Romans 10:17). It is the Word that nourishes our souls (1 Peter 2:2). We need the Bible to grow strong and spiritually healthy.

Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus that savage wolves would come in among them, not sparing the flock. They'll speak twisted and perverse ideas that will draw disciples away from the Lord's way. This false teaching will split the church. What did Paul recommend? The Bible says, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). To follow Christ we must have the Word. Nothing else will do!

So, Paul warns Timothy, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; (that is, healthy teaching) but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they'll accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and they'll turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, (Timothy) be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:3-5).

Some churches today have forgotten the importance of the Word and have replaced preaching with comic routines, dramatic skits, or self-improvement rallies. We ask, "Where is the Lord in all of this?" Jesus didn't waste His time showing off or trying to exploit people with outlandish claims. The Lord said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He preached a message of repentance, of love, and of salvation. Christianity is more than another course in the power of positive thinking.

Some churches today separate their worship services into traditional and contemporary in order to please everyone. Is pleasing people more important than the unity of the congregation? Perhaps they've bought into a consumer mentality where what people want overrides what God wills. Is it God's will that people's worship desires are more important than what God requires? Is pleasing people more important than pleasing God?

The Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21). God wants His people to be one, not separated in this group and that. If we cannot assemble with each other because we have different tastes in worship, we've become a house divided against itself.

In some churches, women have taken a role of leadership in worship that God does not permit. Several denominations now have women pastors and preachers. First Timothy 2:8 says, "Therefore I want the men (that is, males of full age and stature) in every place (that is, in the church) to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension." Wherever the church meets, God expects men to take the lead.

God says, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. *And it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2:11-14).

This is the Lord's way, for men to lead; cultural change doesn't change God's will. The Lord desires men to lead the church. To support this, Paul appeals to creation and to the fall of Adam and Eve. Paul uses events from the beginning to show this is a fundamental principle for all time and all cultures. It is God's will that men lead in the worship of the church. Friends, let's commit ourselves to the will of God.

Showing God love and respect in worship requires listening to God to find out what He desires and requires. Cain lived his life on his own terms without faith or thought about God, and God had no regard for Cain or for His sacrifice. If we live on our terms and lose sight of God's will, what makes us think that God will accept our worship? God sees and knows all about us.

God expects our hearts to be right before Him if we're to worship Him. God did not accept the worship of Israel in Isaiah's time because they were living wicked lives. You can't live like the devil six days a week and expect the Lord to accept you when you worship on the first day of the week. God expects His people to forsake their sins. You cannot be right with God until you're washed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

My friend, are you right with God? Perhaps today you need to establish a relationship with the Lord, because you want to worship and thank Him. To become His child you must place your faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God; you must repent of your sins and turn to the Lord; you must confess your faith before others; and you must be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38 and 22:16). When you're baptized into Christ, you're baptized into His death according to Romans 6:3. Baptism connects you with the blood of Christ and freedom from sin. Romans 6:4 tells us that baptism raises us up with Christ so that we may walk in newness of life. Today, is the best day to get right with God. We ask that you worship with one of the churches of Christ served by this station and let them know that you want to get right with God. You'll be glad you did.

## Worship in Song

God desires our worship in song to glorify Him in spirit and in truth. How we worship God in song matters to God, and it should matter to us. God's Word is a light to our paths and a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119 :105). We go to God's Word as the authority for all that we do.

I love to sing hymns. I cannot remember a time when singing hymns was not a part of my life. Jackie and I had the song "Be With Me, Lord" sung at our wedding, only we changed the words to "Be with Us, Lord." Jackie and I sang spiritual songs with our four children because we wanted to instill in our daughters the love that we had for God. Our girls are old enough to sing hymns and spiritual songs with their children. Some of the happiest moments of our lives have been spent worshipping God in song.

Hymns and spiritual songs praise God; they teach valuable lessons; and they stir the heart. Singing involves the whole person: the heart, the mind, the voice, and the lips. Songs send a message of love, thanksgiving, and adoration. By singing, we praise God and build up one another. The Lord blessed us greatly when He instructed us to sing from our hearts.

The music of the church provides a great blessing, but it also has challenges. Many focus on the music they like and lose sight of what God desires or requires. Others go far beyond what the Lord asks. Since the Lord seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth, we must ask what the will of the Lord is. What is the Lord's way for us to worship Him in song?

Our reading today comes from the book of Ephesians 5:17-21. "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

To learn the truth about Christian worship in song we must go to the New Testament. So let's review the relevant passages pertaining to musical worship among Christians. The first mention of singing a hymn in the New Testament is found in Matthew 26:30 and a like passage in Mark 14:26. The Lord had just instituted the Lord's Supper; "After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

In the book of Acts 6:25, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison and they had their feet in the stocks for healing a servant girl. The Bible says, "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." These are simple statements about Christians singing.

In Romans 15:9, Paul speaks of the Gentiles glorifying God; as it is written, "Therefore I will give praise to thee among the gentiles, and I will sing to thy name." This quotation emphasizes how a congregation in one accord and with one voice should glorify God (Romans 15:6).

In 1 Corinthians 14, there are two references to singing. Verse 15 says, "I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also." The emphasis in singing is on the spirit and the mind. Verse 26 says, "What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." The early church edified each other by teaching songs and singing them.

Ephesians 5:18-19 says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." The emphasis in this passage is on

speaking to one another and in making melody with the heart to the Lord. The idea of having concerts or of playing instruments of music in worship is absent in these passages. There were no choirs, because everyone was to sing.

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." The emphasis again is on singing words that teach and admonish. These are activities that require the heart, the mind, and the lips.

The writer of the book of Hebrews twice mentions praising God in song. First, in Hebrews 2:12 which quotes from Psalm 22:22, "I will proclaim Thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise." Again, the idea is verbal, proclaiming and singing. Second, Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him (that is, through Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." The last mention of Christian worship in song is found in James 5:13, which says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises."

In each instance, the music described in Christian worship emphasizes verbal communication: singing, speaking, teaching, admonishing, making melody in your hearts, confessing, giving thanks, proclaiming, and the fruit of lips. The clear instruction of the New Testament is that we should sing from our hearts praise to God. Instruments of music cannot speak, teach, admonish, give thanks, praise, proclaim, confess, or make melody in your heart. Instruments of music fail to do any of the things that are in God's instructions. They are additions that go beyond the instructions of the New Testament.

The fact that there is no reference in the New Testament to the use of instrumental music in Christian worship is startling! Neither Jesus nor the apostles commanded them. The New Testament gives no example of churches using them in worship. God desires singing from the heart, but He is silent about using instruments.

Most people think churches have always used instruments of music in worship. They're surprised that some churches don't use instruments, and they think it's peculiar. The early church, however, didn't use instruments; and some churches, like the Orthodox churches, have never used instruments. The word a cappella is a reference to singing unaccompanied and means "in the manner of the church."

Early Christians actually rejected instrumental music in worship. For several centuries, they strongly opposed using instruments. Not until the thirteenth century did churches widely begin using the instruments. Both Jews and Greeks used instruments in their worship. Converts to Christianity knew this, but they still sang unaccompanied. They consciously said no, because they had no God-given reason to use them.

Dr. Everett Ferguson said, "It is quite late before there is evidence of instrumental music, first the organ, played in the public worship of the church. Recent studies put the introduction of instrumental music even later than the dates found in reference books. It was perhaps as late as the tenth century when the organ was played as part of the service. This makes instrumental music one of the late innovations of the medieval Catholic church."

As late as 1250 AD, Thomas Aquinas said, "Our church does not use instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God that she may not seem to Judaize." He understood that harps were for Jews, not for Christians. Instruments of music came along as an innovation brought in because people wanted them, not because the New Testament gave instructions for them.

God has revealed His will in His Word. The Lord promised the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all the truth in John 16:13. "All the truth" means the New Testament teaches



us everything that God wanted us to know to have eternal life and to live the Christian life. Nothing is missing. We shouldn't imagine that God has forgotten something. When God revealed all the truth, He did not need to say more. To think we need more and to introduce new practices denies that we have all the truth. When we aren't content with God's teaching but go beyond that teaching, we're actually showing dishonor to God. Starting new practices, going beyond God's teaching, is presumptuous. It fails to listen to God and it builds on sand.

The Lord said, "If you abide in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Christ here reveals the mark of a true disciple; a true disciple abides in His Word. He doesn't add to it, take away from it, reinvent it, or change it. He stays in the boundaries of the teaching and instructions of the Word. The person who stays with the word will know the truth, and the truth will set him free. When you leave the Word or you tamper with the truth, you end up with man-made religion.

Someone says "Phil, don't you know that David played the harp?" Yes, I'm aware of passages like Psalm 150 and 2 Chronicles 29:25. I also know that David lived a thousand years before Jesus Christ. David was not a Christian, and we're exploring how Christians worshiped, not how the Israelites of old worshiped. We don't offer animal sacrifices as David did. David lived under the old covenant, while we live under the new covenant. In 2 Chronicles 29:25, God approved of harps in the worship of the temple under the old covenant; but the New Testament never speaks of the use of instruments of music in Christian worship.

Some say that the word "psalm" and the Greek word psallo, used in Ephesians 5:19 for "making music in the heart," permits us to play instruments. While it is true that many years before the New Testament, the Greek word psallo meant to pluck on a string or play a harp; however the word changed in meaning over time. Someone says how did this happen?

The Jews sang psalms with instruments in the Temple but sang without them outside the temple. Musical worship in the temple was limited to the Levites who had choirs with many instruments, but the worship outside had no musical instruments. Jews regularly sang psalms for hundreds of years without any use of the harp. They chanted psalms and many of their daily prayers without any instrument at all.

So when the Jews used the word psallo or the word psalm, they normally thought of singing the words of the song unaccompanied. It never occurred to early Christians, who know Greek better than we do, that the words psallo or psalms meant that we should or could use instruments in worship. If those words had pointed to instruments, why didn't the early church use them? Why did they refuse them? Why did it take many centuries before someone started using them if those words wanted them to use instruments.

Others ask, "Phil, aren't people playing harps in heaven?" Yes, John's visions found in the highly figurative book of Revelation speaks of harps in heaven. Saints in heaven also wear crowns and cast them before the throne of God. Angels and people in heaven say many things in heaven that Christians are not allowed to say on earth (2 Corinthians 12:4). Heaven and earth are very different. Let's ask "What does God want us, on earth, to do?"

Our task is not to imitate what's done in heaven, but to obey Jesus and His teachings in the New Testament. If harps in heaven means the church ought to play harps, why didn't the apostles and the early church understand that they were supposed to play them? Why did they refuse to play them for centuries?

Someone says, "Well, Phil, that's just your tradition." The word tradition speaks of what has been passed down from an authority. We have an authority in Scripture for singing. It's the use of instruments that is of human origin.

Someone says, "Well, the Bible doesn't condemn playing an organ!" That's true; it doesn't say that particular phrase. But neither does the Bible specifically condemn burning incense, or praying to saints, or using roast lamb in the Lord's Supper, or offering animal sacrifices, or substituting sprinkling for immersion in baptism, or baptizing infants. Just because the Bible doesn't specifically condemn something doesn't mean that God approves of it.

These things, like using an instrument of music in worship, come not from God but from men. The right question is not "Where does the Bible condemn an instrument in worship?" but rather the question should be, "Where does the New Testament instruct us to use instruments of music in Christian worship?" To act without God's instruction, without His teaching, is presumptuous; it's building on sand.

If the Bible were to include everything that God condemned, it would surely be too large to carry. The Lord has chosen to instruct us in positive terms what His will is for our lives and our worship. He has shown us the way, which rules out all other ways. There is only "one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5); and that means that there cannot be other approved baptisms. The Bible says there is only "one gospel" in Galatians 1:6-9 and so that condemns any other gospel. The Bible says there is "one body" (or church, Ephesians 4:4; and chapter 1:22-23). That means there cannot be other approved churches.

The specific instruction to sing means one should sing. There is no authority to add other forms of music. When God instructs us through His Word, He tells us what He wants us to know. We shouldn't expect God to exclude all other possibilities with a series of "don'ts."

If I went to a restaurant and I ordered fried chicken and mashed potatoes, I'd expect the waitress to bring just what I ordered. If she brought me liver and onions, I'd say to her, "This is not what I ordered; I ordered fried chicken and mashed potatoes." Telling her what I want specifically excludes everything else. Wouldn't it be ridiculous if I had to go down the whole menu and tell her everything I don't want? We need to hear and do what God says.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord told this story: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall" (Matthew 7:24-27).

Wisdom is hearing God's Word and doing it. Foolishness is hearing God's Word but doing something else that you want to do. I can read clearly in the New Testament the Lord's instructions about singing in worship. Not one word of the New Testament is said about using instruments of music in Christian worship. They weren't used in any church for hundreds of years. Let's put singing in worship on one side and singing with instruments on the other. They're different, aren't they? Let me ask you this question. Which one is wise and follows the Lord's teaching and which one is foolish by failing to do what God teaches? Which does the Lord's will and which is an innovation of man?

In the same way, we should come to God in faith and obedience. If there is sin in your life and you are not yet a child of God, a Christian, why not become one today. You can do so by believing Jesus is the Christ, by repenting of your sins, by confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). That's how people became Christians according to the Scriptures, and how you can become one, too. Be wise and follow what the Lord teaches. You'll never regret doing the right thing.

## Worship in Prayer

Prayer is man's great opportunity to pour out his heart to God, the Father. In this lesson, we'll explore ways to make our prayer lives more meaningful. The Bible opens up the heart of God for us, and we want to know as much about God as possible.

God has blessed us with the privilege of prayer. Our Father in Heaven keeps His ears open every moment of our lives. We might go to sleep praying to Him, but He never goes to sleep on us. The Bible simply says, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). No one can pray twenty-four hours a day. That's not what this passage is saying. Rather, God wants us to make prayer a daily habit and never quit on Him. When we begin to understand our complete dependence on God, we also begin to understand what a privilege it is to pray.

One of the most important moments of life comes when we awaken to our need for God and our inability to manage life on our own. Abraham Lincoln said: "I've been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." We sometimes think we have everywhere else to go—doctors, lawyers, professors, banks, or schools. Many people have forgotten their need for God. When people imagine that they can get along just fine without God, they cease to pray and start losing their way.

Prayer is the thermometer of our spiritual lives. A person who ceases to pray starts moving away from God. One who prays only when he's in trouble has little understanding of God. Prayer is how we grow close to God how, we stay close to Him. So we need prayer for our spirits just like we need air for our lungs.

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus when He teaches His disciples how to pray. Matthew 6:9-13. "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]"

Let's pray together. O, Father, we're so grateful that you have loved us in so many ways and have given us Your Word and given us the right to pray and the privilege to pour out our hearts before You. Father, we pray that we may live in such a way to honor You and glorify Your name. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen

Prayer is one of the sacred moments of life. Prayer is personal time with our Father in Heaven in which we reveal our hearts. In prayer, we honor and recognize the place God has in our lives. We hallow the name of our Father. To hallow is to honor as holy. God's name is already holy. But we need to say with our prayers what the twenty-four elders who surrounded the throne of God said, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

Jesus prayed often and fervently. Luke 5:6 says, "Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." In Luke 6:12, before He appointed apostles, Jesus "went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." When Jesus was being crucified, he began His death with prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing." And He ended His time on the cross in prayer, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." That's Luke 23:34 and 46. If the Lord Jesus Himself had such a need for prayer, certainly we need to pray as well.

The Lord Jesus taught to us pray to “Our Father.” When we pray as Christians, we can approach God’s throne because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus didn’t say, “My Father”; He said, “Our Father.” Every Christian is a child of God. Galatians 3:26-27 says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Because we’re sons of God through Jesus, we have access to the Father. When we pray to the Father, we should pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you” (John 16:23).

Our Father lovingly and wondrously invites us to pray. God already knows what’s on our hearts. The Lord said, “your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). The Lord wants us to pray, because it’s important for us to approach God for our needs, to thank Him for all that He has done, and to remind ourselves of our utter dependence upon our Father in Heaven.

The Lord said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:7-11).

We don’t have a reluctant God who ignores us. We don’t have to beg God to let us pray. Our God is not like the pagan gods of the Gentiles who cried out with “meaningless repetitions.” No! God wants us to pray, just as any father wants to hear from his children. God wants to bless our lives.

When you ask of God, ask in faith. Jesus said, “Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, Jesus says, that whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, that all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you” (Mark 11:22-24).

Again, the Bible says, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5-8).

Sometimes people pray for the wrong things. When we ask God to bless us, we should consider whether what we are asking is God’s will. Our desires and God’s will are not always the same. The Bible says, “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we also know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

When you pray, do not ask with selfish motives. The Bible says, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You’re envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:1-3).

When people ask God to bless them so they can fulfill the desires that arise from their conflicts and envious ways, God refuses to help. He is not interested in blessing people to further their wrong motives and sinful attitudes. God doesn't help people sin or fulfill their lusts. Their prayers actually crowd God out, because they're thinking more of themselves than they are of God's will.

God wills that we pray for material blessings. That's true. After all, Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." But in praying that, we're not praying for cake, but for bread. God will give us bread, which is necessary for life but not necessarily for luxuries.

Some preachers, to hear their message, think the most important thing is to be lavishly blessed in this life. In the name of God, they make outlandish promises while they hope to exploit people. Don't be deceived by these preachers. God provides for our needs to do His work, but the Lord is not interested in supplying selfish desires.

The Lord teaches us to pray, "Thy will be done." He prayed that in great sorrow while in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus knew of the pain that He would bear in the scourging and in the crucifixion. Jesus knew that He had to bear the punishment for the sins of the whole world. He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). He didn't want to bear that cup of wrath; yet He knew He must.

For Jesus, doing the will of the Father was more important than His own desires or comfort. He wanted to serve His Father and to bless you and me with forgiveness more than He wanted freedom from pain. There is something worse than physical pain, and that's for anyone to be lost in sin. Jesus was willing to bear the terrible pain of physical death so that He could deliver us from spiritual death caused by sin.

We too should pray "Thy will be done." Wouldn't this be a wonderful world if everyone prayed for God's will to be done and then practiced the will of God? We need the will of God to be done in our lives! If people did God's will, they would cease to be criminals, cease to be violent, and learn how to forgive. This would bring healing. If people would repent of sin and follow the Lord's way, we would see a tremendous change in our lives, our homes, our communities, and our country.

On the other hand, Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." If I allow sin to be the focus of my heart, I can't imagine that God is willing to hear my prayer and bless me with a positive answer. Sometimes people imagine sin will bring them happiness and explain their behavior with the statement, "God just wants me to be happy." No, God doesn't want that kind of happiness. The Lord desires that we find lasting joy of righteous living, not the temporary happiness of sin.

When you pray to God asking for forgiveness, be ready to grant forgiveness, too. If you have an unforgiving spirit, you can't expect God to forgive you. The Lord said, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions" (Mark 11:25). Matthew 6:14 says, "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Our prayers can be hindered if we mistreat our loved ones. The Bible says to husbands, "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she's a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). We cannot mistreat each other, husbands or wives, parents or children, and expect to be able to live in harmony with God.

Our prayers matter to God! The Lord told His disciples in the Garden, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). When we want to do the right thing, God is there to help. Psalm 34:15 says, “The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry.”

When we pray, let’s wait on the Lord to answer. He knows the right time to answer a prayer, but His time may not be ours. We may not be ready for His answer. I love the faith of Jeremiah who suffered much for his faith, but he kept close to the Lord. He wrote, “The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him” (Lamentations 3:25). Yes, the Lord wants us to persevere in prayer and not lose heart (Luke chapter 18).

The apostle Paul said, “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). I also recall 2 Corinthians 9:8, which says, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” Oh, we need to give ourselves to the will of God; and then His grace will abundantly supply our every need.

When you’re troubled, pray. The Bible says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). Oh, God will set a guard around your heart and give you amazing peace when you take your concerns and worries to Him.

When Darius, the king of Persia, made a law against praying to anyone but him, Daniel disobeyed. He knew that he needed God. Daniel would rather spend one night in a lion’s den than to lose one day in prayer to God. Don’t let even one day go by without prayer. Let’s pray together. O, heavenly, Father we’re thankful that You hear our prayers and that You love us. Help us, heavenly Father, to bring our wills in harmony with Your will. Help us to love You, to honor You, and to serve You. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

God will always act wisely and in our best interests. Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” We can believe God will help us through every struggle. We may not always understand what, how, or why God is doing what He’s doing; but God knows what we don’t know, and He sees what we can’t see. Trust God!

An unknown confederate soldier was found dead with these words in his pocket: “I asked God for strength that I might achieve; He made me weak that I might obey. I asked for health that I might do great things; He gave me grace that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy; He gave me poverty that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men; He gave me weakness that I might feel a need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; He gave me life that I might enjoy all things. I received nothing I had asked for; He gave me all that I had hoped for.”

Oh, I tell you, let’s pray God’s will be done in our lives. Friends, please pray for this gospel ministry. Ask God to open a door to us for the Word, that we might declare the gospel clearly, boldly, and with love. Ephesians 3:20 says God is “able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” Prayer puts the power of God to work in our lives.