

# HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

## Part 1

Dr. George O. Wood

I'd like to share with you this evening and also some succeeding Sunday evenings, "How shall we worship God?" God has not left our worship of him to chance. He has given us specific guidelines in his word for worship. And he's also allowed us a great deal of freedom in participatory experience.

Last evening a group of us were here at the sanctuary attempting to do some last minute cleanup chores. I was talking to Laura who was greatly responsible for the design of these worship banners. She was commenting on the fact that it was such a joy to work on them. Because at the same time devotionally she was in the book of Exodus on the description of the tabernacle and saw God's tremendous care for the details of the assembly of the tents of meeting in the wilderness, a transition location like ours. And that when she came into the sanctuary and saw that the worship banners coordinate with the pews, which she didn't know we were using these (These are out of the prayer chapel in the old chapel) it was such a delight to come in and see how it all fit together. She said, "I got a new feeling for how it was in the Old Testament for the people of God to gather together and find that God had it all fit together."

A great feature of our church and a continuing strong feature that I believe God wants us to develop in the days ahead is we are a worshipping community. The word "worship" in both the Old and the New Testament by way of introduction is that which means service. It stood in the Old Testament as the service of a hired servant he prostrates himself before a master. Prostrates in reverential awe and worship, respect and obedience. But worship also in the Old Testament is never something, which is strictly a master-servant relationship. God invites us into fellowship with Him. Exodus 21:5-6 perhaps puts the worship of a servant very well when describing how if a manservant had been in bondage to another person. On the seventh year they were to be released. But he could choose not to be released. "If he chose not to be released but rather to continue to be the servant to his master he was to come and declare in that seventh year 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free.' Then his master shall take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door, or to the door post and pierce his ear." A guy would stick his ear up against the door post and they'd take an awl, a sharp instrument and plunge it through his earlobe signifying that from then on he had chosen to be a free servant of his master.

This is really what worship is to the Lord. It may be that when you were a child if you had this experience you were forced to go to church. As a preacher's kid it was expected that I be there. But there comes a moment in life where you choose to be God's servants. Jesus indicated that this servanthood is to be one, which comes from a love that springs from our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength. We worship God from a sense that we are his servants.

We worship God lovingly. We worship God seriously. We worship God joyfully. We worship God enthusiastically as well. All of these maybe at different times. You're probably aware that the word "enthusiastic" comes from the Greek words, which mean "in God." So when you're enthusiastic, you're in God. Why should we let someone else tell that word out of our vocabulary? That's a Christian vocabulary word – enthusiastic.

# HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

## Part 1

Worship involves music, praise, physical and vocal response. It may take many different forms. Sometimes it's spontaneous. Sometimes it's planned. Sometimes it's very loud and sometimes it's very quiet. It may be an explosive celebration. It may be simply the on the faces reverence that we see in one another. It may come in choruses or anthems. But all of us in worship have a responsibility for seeking God from our hearts. Because worship, serving God in this way is a highly participatory experience and it's open to all. When we talk about worship, scripture will be our sources or our pattern and principle. Edification of one another is our goal. And decency and order are constant watchwords in worship. We know that God has reached out to us so worship involves us reaching out to God.

The Bible gives us some very clear guidelines, some elementary principles, foundations of worship. They are these two foundational principles.

One – a right relationship. First a right relationship with God. It's very difficult to worship God without seriously considering our relationship with Him. If we come with this clouding that relationship or come without pondering enough that relationship it may be that we are simply then reciting words or going through motions. Psalm 66:16-20 tells us “Come and listen all you who fear God. Let me tell you what he has done for me. I cried out to him with my mouth. His praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But God has surely listened and heard my prayer. Praise be to God who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me.” The psalmist has reflected on his relationship with the Lord and said, “If I come before you without seriously dealing with the problem of sin in my, life then you would not have listened to me.”

1 John 1:7-9 says “If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son purifies us from every sin. If we claim to be without sin then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins he's faithful and just and will forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

So it might be well as we are beginning to prepare to come to the sanctuary whether it's a Sunday morning or evening to begin as we're on the way, as we leave home to have a moment of conscious reflection upon our relationship with the Lord and realize at that particular moment we're going to worship with other believers not to put in an appearance, not to go through the forms. But because by being together with other believers we are in that moment creating or being part of an experience where we are loving God from our heart and soul. So our relationship with Him is the foundation.

Then worship too bids us to consider as part of that right relationship not only a right relationship with God but a right relationship with each other. Matthew 5:23-24 says “Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar [and that's how an Old Testament person would have worshipped, offering a gift at an altar] and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.”

God doesn't give us real freedom in worship if our relationship with other people are significantly out of kilter. That doesn't mean that all relationships are perfect. But it says that there is a serious attempt to work on those relationships and have forgiveness and love and understanding.

# HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

## Part 1

Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:8 “I want men [and I think he means women as well] everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing.” So right relationships with others. Foundation of worship.

The second foundation of worship is right motivation. We come to worship first of all not to be seen by other people, Matthew 6:1. “Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them. If you do you will have no reward from your father in heaven.” So when we gather for worship is not so whether someone else might notice whether or not we’re there. That could be very important to us at times when we want encouragement. But not to be seen by men to worship God. We’re coming in worship as a motivation not to please other people or to conform to them. Paul says in Galatians 1:10 “Am I trying now to win the approval of men or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men I would not be a servant of Christ.” We’re really coming to worship from a motivation of praising God for who he is in his character and in his activity.

There is a long song in the Chronicles, 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 I’d encourage you to read it sometime this week. It finds David after the return of the Ark of the Covenant to the people of Israel, praising God for exactly this very thing. “God, I’ve begun to realize who you are and what you’ve done for us. And I will praise you.”

If these are some of the foundations how do we begin to praise God together? Tonight I’m just going to start on this question, how we begin to praise him together. When we enjoy something we spontaneously praise what we enjoy. If something has attracted us, it’s beautiful and we want to express our appreciation for it. A sunset, a good dinner. It’s a natural inclination to praise it. We just as spontaneously invite other people to join us in praise. No love or joy is really complete until we’ve expressed it in praise. A good thing can’t be kept.

So it is with God. We’re the people whom God describes as a people “Whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise.” God wants us to do that with him, that we’ve found something in God that is worthy of praise. How do we then praise him? Tonight we’ll look at the whole idea of praising him with vocabulary. There are several different ways we praise him.

One way in a worship service we praise God is with silence. Silence is simply internal words not spoken. Psalm 46:10 says “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.” Habakkuk 2:20 “But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before him.”

Many times silence occurs in a worship service and people rather than praising God in it are uncomfortable with it. I used to be that way in respect to silence. A deadness, a pause, a waiting, and you kind of look around... “What’s going to happen next?” Or you’re in a prayer group and people are supposed to be praying one after another or in a meeting like this we invite people to pray and maybe there’s a lag between one person and the next person. You can very quickly get edgy and uncomfortable with that.

But there is another dimension to turning that into a very positive experience of worship. Silence can be a moment in which we begin to actively think of God and pray to God and say, “Use this

## HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

### Part 1

moment in my life to help me praise you.” I often, in a time of silence in a public worship service, will begin praying, “Lord, maybe you want some gift of the Spirit to emerge at this moment. Help us not to be so jammed in this service that we’re rushing from one item to the next that we can’t now take this moment to pause and reflect on what you may want to do next, that we have not pre-visualized.” Especially I’ve found that true at communion. That it’s all right to have significant moments of pause and silence that we might meditate with unspoken words in our heart to God. Silence is an important dimension of worship.

Another way that we worship God of course is with speaking. These are words, which are given breath. Psalm 71:8 “My mouth is filled with your praise declaring your splendor all the day long.” Psalm 96:7-10 “Ascribe to the Lord O families of the earth, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. Tremble before him all the earth. Say [or speak] among the nations the Lord reigns. The earth is formally established. It cannot be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.”

Say to the Lord – we do this with unison readings. We will do it with many of us praising the Lord at one time simply speaking the praises the Lord. This is not something we’ve cooked up as some sub-cultural tradition or something. This is an admonition given to us in scripture that when we gather together we should speak. Sometimes it’s one person speaking. Sometimes it’s many of us speaking all the same words all together, all at once. Other times it’s all of us speaking but perhaps saying differing words because in our experience God has revealed himself as very special to us in a way that maybe someone else has not exactly at that moment attuned to that experience but God has dealt with them in another way. So then we come together and we speak. And we ought to not be hesitant to speak to God in a public sense. One of the dimensions of Pentecostal worship is that we have a chance to vocalize to God and not just be silent. But to speak out to God.

You may have been uncomfortable with this in prayer of joining in public praying with others when they begin to pray and worship. I have found that generally I am uncomfortable with what is not a habit. If I’m to be comfortable with it then I make it a habit. I would suggest that if you’re uncomfortable speaking out to God in a worship service than rather than chaffing at that you begin to make it a habit. And as you begin to make it a habit all of a sudden it will be natural for you to begin to speak to God his praise and join in with the saints.

Another way that we worship God together with our words is through singing. Singing is simply words with music. Psalm 69:30 “I will praise God’s name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.” Psalm 92:1-4 “It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O most high. To proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night to the music of the ten string lyre and melody of a harp for you make me glad by your deeds O Lord I sing for joy at the works of your hand.”

Why did God make us with the capacity to sing? Why not just with the capacity to speak? I think it’s because singing touches deeper into our soul and requires more of the revelation of our inner character and allows a much greater range of response to God. Words with music bring us to a dimension of our personality that simply speaking it doesn’t. So God says tap deeper into the reaches of your soul.

## HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

### Part 1

Things I don't like about singing. One, I don't like perfunctory singing. I don't think there can be any good singing to God that's perfunctory. It ought to be ebullient. Or even if it's a slow song it ought to be done with feeling. Feeling is a part of music and we ought to constantly put ourselves into the song.

Another thing I don't like is songs that have worn out. They're like a 78 record that have played too many times. Sometimes you need to back off something for a while in order to revive its meaning.

Another thing that is really important in worship is we not just settle down with what we know. In this church there is always the willingness to learn new things.

When we sing together too it's good that we sing if possible on key. There are always some who like to harmonize. Psalm 98:1 says "Song to the Lord a new song for he has done marvelous things..." Acts 16:25 "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. And the other prisoners were listening to them." What were they singing? I don't know but I have a feeling they lifted up their voice in that prison and were singing something about the resurrection and power of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 14:15 "What shall I do? I will [an act of volition, an act of decision] pray with my spirit. I will pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit and I will sing with my mind." Sing to one another, Paul says to the Ephesians in chapter 5. "Sing with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." So we sing when we gather together.

We're also supposed to laugh according to the scripture. From time to time we're suppose to laugh together as an act of worship. Or just laugh because we're having a good time. Psalm 5:11 "But let all who take refuge in you be glad. Let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them that those who love your name may rejoice in you." Psalm 32:11 "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad. Sing you who are upright in your heart." Psalm 126:1-3 "When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion we were like men in a dream. Our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy." Zephaniah 3 "Sing O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O Israel. Be glad and rejoice with all your heart." And you see people coming from captivity singing and rejoicing.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 "Be joyful always." Jesus himself is described in Luke 10 "At that time, Jesus full of joy..." Why was he full of joy? Because the disciples' names were written in the book of heaven.

So rejoicing and joy ought to be a part of our worship. Sometimes we'll do this by asking everyone to do this by singing a joyful song. Other times I'd like to see kind of a laughter come over the congregation just as an act of worship. I've seen sometimes God's Spirit fall on a congregation in such a way that everybody was so alive and happy and joyful in God that they laughed. Laughing. Why shouldn't we laugh? God in Christ has won victory. Laugh!

Another expression of worship when we gather together is weeping. What is weeping? Laughing is words run over by joy. Weeping is words run over by sorrow. Ecclesiastes tells us there's a time to laugh and a time to weep.

## HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

### Part 1

Sometimes we weep because we feel our lives are barren. Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:10 is saying to the high priest Eli “In bitterness of soul Hanna wept much and prayed to the Lord.” And she explained why she was weeping so much. Because she was barren.

Weeping may be a time of illness and frustration in our life. Psalm 6:6 “I am worn out from groaning and all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.”

Weeping may occur in worship because we’ve come face to face with a sin that is in our lives. So David writes in Psalm 51 “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. O God, you’ll not despise these.”

Weeping may become because of captivity. Psalm 126 “Restore our fortunes O Lord. They who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.”

From time to time God will give us a special sensitivity in worship that will call upon us to weep.

One other form of worship that comes verbally among us is shouting. Shouting is words with explosion attached to them. Shouting made me nervous. I think shouting is biblical but there’s a way the Bible tells us to shout. Shouting is a tremendous experience in worship. In the Old Testament there is no doubt at all that the Hebrew people from time to time could be quite loud in their praise to God. One word used means “to split the ears with sound” is used in Psalm 66:1. “Shout with joy to God all the earth.” Translated literally, “Split the ears of God with joy all the earth.” Psalm 47:2 “Clap your hands all you people. Shout to God with cries of joy.” And this is what we’re to shout: “How awesome is the Lord most high, the great king over all the earth.” Shout it, don’t just say it.

Another Hebrew word that is used means “clamor”. That is acclamation of joy or a battle cry. Psalm 89:15 “Blessed are the people who know the festal shout.” There’s a lot of God’s people who don’t know. But a special blessing on those who know how to proclaim victorious in God their liberty and victory. Originally it was a battle cry. Joshua 6:5. As he marched around Jericho. “When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets. Have all the people give a loud shout. Then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up every man straight in.

1 Samuel 4:5 “When the ark of the Lord’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.” Psalm 33:3 “Sing to the Lord a new song, play skillfully and shout for joy.” Psalm 95:1-3 “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.” Psalm 47:1-6 “Clap your hands all you nations. Shout to God with cries of joy. He subdued nations under us. People under our feet. God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amidst the sounding of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises. Sing praises to our king, sing praises.”

A charismatic priest writes in Praise a Way of Life this “It was originally a loud war cry. Someone may be inclined therefore to reject the festal shout as being too primitive for contemporary Americans. Loud praise is often disdained as unrefined, excessively emotional, lacking in good taste, offending the sensibilities of many prayerful people. But if in the psalms,

## HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

### Part 1

the Psalmist can shout and praise God for being king of the nations and delivering his people through the sea, can we not have a shout in respect to the resurrection of Christ from the dead.”

This is substantiated in the New Testament as well. Luke 1:41-44 where Mary comes to visit Elizabeth. “... when she entered Zachariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greetings the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit...”

The same with Jesus, Matthew 21:9 “The crowd that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted ‘Hosanna, to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.’” The whole triumphal entry was a great shout to him.

Luke tells of the one of the ten lepers who when he saw that he was healed came back praising God in a loud voice, he threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.”

Jesus himself prayed to God loudly. Hebrews 5:7 “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”

Why is loudness important? Like singing it draws something more out of our spirit than just talking can do. Revelation 5:11-12 “I looked around and heard the voice of many angels numbering thousands upon thousands and ten thousands times ten thousands.” That’s a crowd. What are they doing? They encircle the throne and the living creatures and the elders in a loud voice, a hundred million people sing “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.” Revelation 19:1-8 also describe shouting in heaven. Verse 6 John says “Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder shouting, ‘Hallelujah for the Lord God almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory for the wedding of the lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen bright and clean was given her to wear.” Shouting.

I think there’s some care we need to exercise in shouting. It is disturbing in a Christian worship service for one person to shout and everybody remains silent. They stick out. Somebody begins shouting all by themselves and unless I can sense, you can sense, they’re uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit they’ll probably ask them to be quiet, that they’re shattering the peace of saints.

But there are other times when God may lead us in an experience of worship to all be happy together, to be joyful to God together. At that moment it’s not the time to keep silent or simply mumble out something. But to all of a sudden enter in and Praise God!

The Lord wants us to go in some new directions. The Lord wants us to open our hearts in more ways to him. We can worship God all of our life. Worship is a continuum. I believe God is calling us as a community of people to expand our range of worship to God. All the way from learning how to better worship God in silence to how to better worship God with a shout. That God has given us many things with which to respond to him. Our part in praise and worship is to learn to do that. I’m not talking about putting on a show, worship that is forced up or worked down. I’m talking about the kind of naturalness that finds it as easy in God’s presence to let the heart really say what it feels, to shout to God, as well as when we’re moved to weep in God’s presence. And I think if God have people who are natural in their expression of worship and that

## **HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER**

### **Part 1**

in the Spirit learn to “play all the keys” that we will see fulfilled in our midst what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 14 that persons coming in who do not know the Lord will be struck by the reality of the worship.

I have long believed that the key to our meeting together is not for me to preach three point evangelistic services that simply restate things that most of the people already know. Yet I have been keenly frustrated by the lack of evangelism that takes place in our services. It seems to me that a real key is to see our gathering together as first of all a worship to God, then a ministry to one another and then the natural overflow of worship will be that those coming into our midst who know not God will see the reality of God and as Paul says, “Fall down on their face and confess God is truly in your midst.”

[end of tape]