

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

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CHAPTER 10

Worship and Praise

Distinguished in Principle—Integrated in Practice

Singing the truth about God emphasizes why He deserves extreme veneration. Songs inform, inspire, and enrich our response of worship. When worshipers make His praise glorious, demonstrative veneration occurs—as a spontaneously response. Songs of praise evoke gestures of worship by highlighting God’s attributes, detailing His achievements, and punctuating His promises. Enlightened lyrics affirm why God merits a response of radical reverence.

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

Twice, Paul exhorts the church to leverage psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for our benefit and the benefit of others. Laced with gratitude, they confirm sound doctrine and stimulate spiritual growth. Singing captivates our attention and focuses our mind, will, and emotions on God and His priorities. Writing to the church at Colossae, Paul highlights the importance of God’s indwelling words.

*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. (Colossians 3:16 NAS)*

Writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul highlights the importance of God’s indwelling Spirit to facilitate harmonious interactions with one another and melodious interactions with the Lord.

*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. (Ephesians 5:18-20 NAS)*

Praise with gratitude promotes unity in the spirit through a shared bond of peace, hope, love, and faith. When performed in concert with the Holy Spirit, inspired lyrics heighten our awareness to God's presence, purpose, and promise. Giving thanks and voicing laudable compliments remind us that God deserves more than a symbolic ritual cloaked in superficial religion. Spirit filled praise reinforces the infinite value of God's worth to us and our worth to Him. Established in truth and revealed by the Spirit, praise evokes a demonstrative response. Extending highest praise to His exalted majesty compels worshipers to respond with comprehensive passion. We love God mentally, emotionally, and kinesthetically with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Wholehearted love requires accurate knowledge and strong emotions.

With deliberate repetition, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs activate sensitive emotions and trigger transformative decisions. They motivate worshipers to pursue, explore, discover, and embrace life-changing encounters in the conscious presence of the Lord.

Praise and Worship

In practice, followers of Christ often use the phrase, "praise and worship" interchangeably. While praise may inform, inspire, complement, and facilitate worship, the two expressions are not identical. The Bible does not emphasize music, praise, or singing in connection with worship. Most biblical references describe gestures of worship without mentioning music, praise, or singing.

Somewhere in the modern culture we've become confused,
thinking that worship and songs are one and the same.¹

Louie Giglio

The phrase "praise and worship" occurs nowhere in the Bible. This fact does not mean that these two expressions do not occur together or that they are any less important. However, this omission stands in sharp contrast with the popular jargon of the 20th and 21st Century.

Literal translators generally avoid rendering Hebrew or Greek words for praise as worship, and vice versa. Praising God differs in purpose and varies in expression from worshiping Him. Strictly speaking, praise means to compliment. It indicates why God deserves worship. By applauding His attributes and acclaiming His performance, praise magnifies the truth about God's worth. It highlights worthy merits by commending worthy accomplishments and extoling worthy promises.

¹ Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe—Worship as a Way of Life*, Multnomah, 2003, p 71.

Worship stands out in the Bible as an exclusive response different from praise and separate from song. It is a sacred gesture, distinguished in motive and specialized in method. Only God merits worship. He alone deserves this unique level of radical reverence, respect, admiration, awe, veneration, and homage.

Praise on the other hand, may apply to angels, humans, animals, and inanimate objects. While individuals may offer praise to God, they also praise entertainers, educators, athletes, technologies, organizations, and structures. Applying expressions of worship to any other entity whether animate or inanimate, contradicts its unique purpose.

Both angels and humans offer radical reverence based on their appraisal of divine reality. Worshipers gauge their response of worship on praiseworthy evidence gained through divine revelation, personal experience, or direct exposure. The veracity of God's worth evokes an intensity in praise and integrity in worship.

Music for Praising the Lord

The Bible emphasizes both singing and music for offering praise to God. David made musical instruments specifically for this purpose. After consecrating them to the Lord, he commissioned skilled musicians to play when he gave thanks and proclaimed God's love.

*The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with **the LORD'S musical instruments**, which **King David had made for praising the LORD** and which were used **when he gave thanks, saying, "His love endures forever."** Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, **and all the Israelites were standing.** (2 Chronicles 7:5-6 NAS)*

With or without lyrics, music injects evocative power and influence. It triggers various emotions, stimulates creativity, facilitates comprehension, and reinforces memory retention. Music primes listeners to explore, discover, and embrace the truth about God and us. When played with sensitivity, music sets a receptive tone for teachers, preachers, exhorters, and encouragers. Harmonious interludes promote hallowed meditation and sacred contemplation. Melodious sound provides a focused atmosphere for spiritual reflection as listeners confess sins, convey love, and present offerings. Music captivates the soul, elevating hope, and inspiring prayers of faith and deeds of devoted service. We have yet to realize all the benefits derived from music.

When the Spirit of the Lord departed from King Saul an evil spirit terrorized him.² Royal advisors summoned young David, a skilled harpist, to administer music therapy. David's tunes refreshed Saul with a sense of well-being and deliverance from the evil spirit that terrorized him.³ Medical professionals now recognize the healing power of music. They employ certified music therapists, accomplished musicians trained to relieve pain, shorten recovery time, reduce side effects, improve surgical and therapeutic outcomes, and enrich qualities of life. Both hearing and playing music promotes mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Praise—A Catalyst for Worship

"Music, rather than being the act of worship, becomes the catalyst for worship. We remind people that there is a God worthy of our praise, worthy of our affection, and jealous for our love in the wildest and most wonderful of ways."⁴ (Dan Haseltine, Jars of Clay)

A wall of partition does not separate praise from worship. These two expressions belong together. They augment one another with different but supporting motives and complementary intentions. On a foundation of informed truth, the high praises of God ascend with a crescendo, inspiring worshipers to respond with radical reverence.

According to Jack Hayford, "The importance of music to the modern Reformation of Worship can't be overstated."⁵ He believes that singing praise will contribute to an immense spiritual breakthrough for the following reasons:

Singing will soften hearts and allow the Word of God to convict hardened souls. Worshipful singing will serve as the cutting edge of a Reformation of Worship.⁶

Make His Praise Glorious!

Sing the glory of His name; Make His praise glorious.

Psalm 66:2 NAS

² I Samuel 16:14

³ I Samuel 16:14

⁴ Dan Haseltine, Jars of Clay, in the Afterward to Charlie Peacock's book, *At the Crossroads, Inside the Past, Present, and Future of Contemporary Christian Music*, WaterBrook Press a division of Random House, Inc., Colorado Springs, 2004, p. 208.

⁵ Michael D. Warden editor for nine contributing authors, *Experiencing God in Worship*, Group Publishing, Inc., Loveland, CO, 2000, p. 149.

⁶ Ibid, p. 149.

Praise inspires worship because it highlights God’s unrivalled worth. When a person appraises God accurately, he or she qualifies to offer effusive praise and explicit worship. Understanding the contribution of each unique gesture clarifies its design and enhances its effectiveness.

Praise and worship converge with cohesive synergy and insight—they complement each other. Knowing praiseworthy details not only informs our mind, it also compels our will and emotions to offer an integrated response of demonstrative worship. As we praise God based on accurate knowledge, we find ourselves worshipping Him with deep conviction.

While anointed music and inspired lyrics supplement expressions of worship, they are not a substitute for it. Mislabeling praise as worship or worship as praise undermines the unique aim associated with each mode of expression. Confusing praise for worship suppresses our explicit response of veneration. When our Heavenly Father seeks worshipers on earth as He does in heaven, He looks for accurately informed responders expressing true reverence with spiritual conviction.

Worship in the Spotlight

Having carefully appraised God’s worth, worshipers communicate more than reverence—they make His praise glorious! In concert with the heavenly host, worshipers exalt the Lord with extravagant accolades. They applaud His attributes, commend His accomplishments, and esteem His promises. They praise Him AND they worship Him.

As worshipers praise God with oratory, music, song, dance, theater, art, and writing, the truth about Him reverberates with profound intensity. Artistic modes of expression focus our attention on the knowledge of the truth—the truth about God, our self, and others. They heighten intellectual awareness and stimulate emotional engagement. When praise artists convey God’s worth, they inspire a riveted response infused with evocative veneration.

Articulating praise, especially through the arts, requires more skill than bowing down does. While God does not need talented experts offering Him polished praise, He certainly deserves them.

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