

I have been asking myself a question for the last few weeks – Why do I go to church each Sunday? I found a survey done in America that asked churchgoers that same question. I was quite surprised by some of the answers. – To become closer to God, for comfort in troubled times, so that our kids would have good moral teaching, to become a better person, to meet new people and socialise, to please their family, many felt obliged to go or they wanted to carry on the family tradition of going to church.

But there is a related question that is a lot more difficult to answer. – Why am I here, Why was I born, what's my purpose in life, why am I here. Some might say – to work to provide for my family, to get a good education, to find a real and lasting loving relationship, to enjoy life. Most people I suspect will find that hard to answer and many spend their lives trying and generally failing. Many end their lives prematurely because they see no purpose in it. So why are we here, why were we created?

To find out , Let's go back to the beginning. God spent several days creating the world and said 'it is good'. It lived up to His expectations and brought Him pleasure. Then he said possibly with a smile on his face – 'let's make a man'. So He took some clay from the earth, shaped it into a man and blew into him the breath of life. He may have taken the man and said to him – look round you, this is all yours. I am here for you. I will look at you and in your face I will see the reflection of My own glory. This is why I made you, so that you can worship me and enjoy Me and glorify Me and have Me as yours forever. God didn't have to make man but He choose to because He wanted the fellowship and the worship that mankind would give Him. He wanted man to bring Him joy and pleasure. God made us to worship Him and fellowship with him. As the shorter Westminster catechism says the chief end of man is to worship God and enjoy Him forever.

But what is worship? The dictionary says that to worship is to honour, to respect, to adore, to esteem, to reverence, pay homage to, to treat with signs of honour. But what about the Bible what does it say worship is? Worship is mentioned over 8500 times in the Bible but no real definition is given. But we can get a good idea of what worship was about in the Bible by looking at some of the words used to express worship.

The most common word (and I won't try to pronounce it) literally means to bend oneself at the waist. Bowing down, kissing feet or the hem of a garment. It was really a total body gesture of respect before someone great. We see Abraham bowing down before the 3 visitors who come to meet him in the desert and Moses bows down before Jethro his future father in law. Worship in this respect was also a spontaneous reaction to a divine action and was motivated by awe and wonder. We see this from the elders of Israel when Moses and Aaron come and tell them all that God was about to do for the people of Israel in setting them free from the Egyptians. In Exodus 4v31 we read – and when they heard that the lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery they bowed down and worshiped.

Another Biblical term often used is the Hebrew word 'abad' which literally means to serve. As in Israel being freed from slavery to serve God exclusively by fearing Him, walking in His ways and obeying His commands. A lifestyle of total allegiance to God. And then there is a group of terms used to express worship as fear, reverence and respect due to God which result in a lifestyle of service to God. So worship from a Biblical point of view means respecting God, revering Him and serving Him by obeying Him, keeping His commands and walking in His ways because of who He is. Worship is a verb, it is a doing word and involves action on our part.

Chuck Swindoll expressed it beautifully. Worship is a human response to a Divine revelation. God says something and we respond, God does something and we respond. God reveals something to us about Himself and we respond. It a bit like a rescue dog in a wonderful, safe, loving home.....

Worship is our response to our Creator, to our Heavenly Father, to our Saviour the Lord Jesus. That is why we were created, that is our purpose in life, that is why we come to church on Sundays – to worship Him.

But obviously we cannot worship appropriately if we are not in a right relationship with Him. We have sinned, so let's come now in prayer and confess our sins to our Father in heaven.

Let's pray

Worship is our response to God, to who He is and what He has done. God made us to worship Him and he wants us to fellowship with Him and honour Him. But we as humans have a tendency to bring God down to our level so we can have a God we can understand and explain. We think we know how He wants to be worshiped. But a lot of the time we get it wrong as God has very definite ways that He wants us to come to Him.

In the old testament God laid down specific guidelines on what worship should be. Firstly it was in a specific place – in the tabernacle or tent of meeting. There Moses and the priests met with God and worshiped Him on behalf of the people. Later in the promised land Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem and that became the place where God was to be worshipped.

In the garden of Eden we see the ideal worship God made us for, walking together with God in the garden in an intimate relationship, doing their best to live for Him. But sin put an end to that ideal.

The Israelites had to bring a sacrifice when they were coming to God and blood had to be shed. God set out lots of festivals as forms of worship and animal sacrifices played a big part in the rituals.

But as time went on the sacrifices became a kind of ritual or ticking the boxes. Their outward worship was not reflected in the inward worship of their hearts. They were just going through the motions and God was not pleased. What He wanted in their worship were hearts and lives devoted to Him. So we hear many verses like these: -

To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams – 1 Samuel 15: 22

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart You will not despise - Psalm 51:17

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice and an acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings – Hosea 6:6

What does the Lord require of you , to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly before your God – Micah 6:8.

That's what God wanted – that their outward worship reflect an inner devotion of their hearts and a life lived as He had commanded them.

Then Jesus came to earth and He totally revolutionised the old idea of worship. No longer did people have to go to Jerusalem to worship God properly. He can be worshipped anywhere, in this church , in every church around the world, in your home, in your car, at work, in the gym, on your walks or runs, anywhere and anytime. He is Spirit and He is everywhere and always available.

In offering Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin Jesus shed His blood as the final sacrifice required by God and we can now come into His presence freely and without blood. We can now approach God personally to worship Him.

But there are still two essential ingredients required for true worship. As Jesus tells the Samaritan woman in that fascinating conversation about worship - God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. That is the kind of worship God wants. He wants our hearts, minds and spirits so in awe of Him that we can't help but worship. And the outward worship that we looked at earlier will flow from hearts that respond to God in true adoration, service and praise.

Our worship must also be in line with the truth that God has revealed to us, The truth we find in the Bible. Truth – God is the creator and sustainer of this world, He is the King of kings and lord of lords, He is God almighty, ever faithful, loving and kind. He is from everlasting to everlasting, He is eternal and so we come and worship Him in reverence, awe and wonder. We respect Him, we honour Him and we desire to be with Him.

The truth – Jesus is the Son of God. He is God. He came freely to become a man and die on a cross to free us from our sins and to gain God's forgiveness for us and so we come and worship Him with total admiration and love and thanksgiving that He did that for each one of us just because He loves us so much.

The truth that we are sinners, not worthy of anything but God's wrath and judgement. We need His forgiveness, cleansing and restoration to a right relationship with Him and so we come and worship Him in total humility and submission

The truth that we cannot hope to worship God properly in our own strength. We need help and the Holy Spirit is our counsellor, our Guide and our teacher. He will help us approach God in the way He wants us to. And so we worship Him in obedience and deep devotion of our hearts.

God made us to worship Him. God wants us to worship Him. And we need to worship so we have a sense of purpose and fulfilment in life. But we also benefit from that worship.

When we celebrate and focus on God we see beyond ourselves. Our hearts are focused on God and a lot of our problems and issues become so small and meaningless in the face of the wonder and awesomeness of God. We loose our fears as we worship God.

Worship refreshed us , it refreshes our spirits. When we have really worshipped God on Sundays and experienced His loving presence we are refreshed and ready for a new week.

As we worship God during our everyday tasks and activities our attitude towards our work changes and the burden of work is lightened, for we know that God is there with us in it and we are really working for Him and serving Him in it.

Worship is our response to our Almighty Father, to our Creator, to our Lord and Saviour. But our worship would be meaningless if we only worshiped Him one hour a week. Worship is not just an event on a Sunday, its not a performance, worship should become our lifestyle.

We will be worshiping God forever in heaven and we might as well practise and do it as much as we can while we are on earth. As they say – practise makes perfect.

I recently read these lovely words which explain worship so well – When we present God with the best of our time, talents and treasures with our hearts motivated by love we are lavishing Him with offerings of priceless worship.

I'd like to finish with some words of Paul's from romans 12 v1 – So here's what I want you to do. God helping you – take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going to work and walking around life and place it before God as an offering. That's the worship God desires from us. That why He made us. That is why we are here this morning, to worship Him, to celebrate Him, to enjoy His presence and to go out and serve him with our whole lives