

4 PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW YEAR – WORSHIP

By Steven Edelman
ROMANS 12:1-2

How do you make worship a priority in your life? Worship flows from a response that God imparts in us. Paul identifies four key responses that are evident in Christian worship.

1. In our worship, God desires for us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (verse 1a)

Worship is a full life response to the mercies of God.

Surrender in service what he has already given.

2. In our worship, God desires for us to be like Him (verse 1b)

Worship flows from Christ-like living.

Application *(We are shaped by what we worship.)*

3. In our worship, God desires for us to renew our mind (verse 2a)

Changing our thinking overcomes our desire to fit into the popular mold of the world.

4. In our worship, we find the will of God (verse 2b)

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In this series we have been looking at four priorities for the New Year. We have focused on the priority of prayer, the priority of immersing ourselves in the word of God, the priority of living in assurance and, today, looking at the priority of worship.

We are going to spend some time unpacking what worship looks like as a priority in our life.

My wife and I met at camp Qwanoes as I was playing keys and she was singing on the worship team. It was our delight to lead the campers and staff in worship twice a day for the whole summer. We had some pretty amazing experiences; the last night of youth camp I remember vividly. Our group time always started with a fun video summary of the day and then the worship team would get up and lead the singing. We would always start off the set with upbeat worship music and as the night progressed the music would get a little slower and more meditative. On that night we were playing 'Sweet Mercies' as our closing song. As the team began to play something happened... some of the youth and staff began to cry. It was an emotional evening for us all but you could see the campers were worshipping with everything they had. The presence of God was so powerful; everyone there knew we were experiencing something very special. At the end of the song, everyone was on their knees and after the song finished... everyone stayed on their knees in silence and in reverence before God for a very long time. That night many gave their lives to Christ and some of the youth wanted to keep on worshipping all throughout the

night. It was a very powerful worship experience for many. Some would define that as the ultimate worship experience. Since that experience, I have debated with friends, pastors, and professors regarding the characteristics of true worship. What is worship? How does a person know if they are truly 'worshipping' God or not? Is the test of whether we are worshipping how the experience makes us feel or is it something else?

As we focus on the priority of worship, let me ask you... What is your preferred or ideal worship experience? For some, it may be their favorite hymn with piano and you throw in three-part harmony and it's golden. When you hear the church drowning out the worship team... now that is a true worship experience. Maybe it's the fully polished band that sounds so good it should be played on the radio. When they let loose... then I can really worship. I believe that we can worship God with many styles of music and our preferences become the very reason we give an excuse not to worship.

I was watching a couple of the recent episodes of The Voice. The Voice is a show in which a contestant sings a song and the judges listen with their back turned. They push their button if their voice moves them and they "want them" to compete on the show. The recent winner, Jordan Smith had an exceptional voice with a natural ability to move people when he sang. Does our worship experience start to look like an episode of the voice? Are we performing so that God will push the button of approval? Did we get it right this week? Did the worship team pick the right song... say the right prayer... did we give enough in the offering this week? Were we

able to avoid reading the worship folder during singing and prayer? Did I really worship?

Marshall Shelly tells a story that raises an interesting question about what we've just been saying. He says, **"Early in our marriage I gave my wife a terrific anniversary gift: a rain gauge. At least I thought it was a great gift. Susan, after all, is a farmer's daughter and keeps close watch on the weather. I envisioned her delight and nostalgia while tracking our back yard precipitation. I congratulated myself on my creativity.**

Guess what? Susan was not impressed: A rain gauge- for our anniversary?!" The rain gauge is now a family joke, a classic example of a gift enjoyed by the giver but not the receiver.

A real gift, as with real worship, means knowing what's important to the receiver." (Marshall Shelly, Perfect Illustrations p306, 2002).

If our focus is only on our experience, we may be giving God a rain gauge.

Are we offering in worship a gift we enjoy and figuring God will like it?

As a pastor for many years I have heard people say things like:

- "The only time I can truly worship is when I have a microphone in my hand."
- "I refuse to 'worship' when you sing that song."
- The guy in front of me was wearing this hideous shirt and I could not sing today.
- I can only worship in creation.

Which brings me to the question... what is biblical worship? Why should it be a priority for the New Year?

The book of Romans responds to this question, “what is worship” in a clever way. The first part of the book, Paul is writing the Romans because he desires the gospel to move forward in Rome. Paul starts by giving a stunning presentation of the gospel that urges a response. He takes this simple inward focused idea of worship and flips it upside down which should help us examine our worship experience. In Roman’s 12, he describes worship as being so much more than an involvement of music and emotions. But, a manifestation of right living because of what God has done in our lives. Paul identifies four key responses that are evident in Christian worship.

1. In our worship, God desires for us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice

Paul writes in Romans 12:1 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual^[1] act of **worship.**”

I urge you means: to “insist.” The word urge falls somewhere between a strong request and a command. *What if I said to my kids, “I urge you to take a bath!” or “I urge you to clean your room!” I would expect a response from my kids. As a result of showing my kids love and discipline, I expect a response.* Paul urges the Christian Romans to respond because of what God has done for them. More importantly, what does a lack of a response say?

The lack of response reveals the condition of our heart.

Worship is a full life response to the mercies of God.

“In view of God’s mercy,” **worship is a life response to the “mercies of God”** that Paul laid out in Romans. This response comes from recognizing what God has given.

- a) His redemptive activity (3:25),
- b) Peace with God (5:1),
- c) Reconciliation (5:10–11),
- d) Freedom from the power of sin (6:18),
- e) The abiding presence of the Spirit (8:11),
- f) Adoption into his family (8:15–16),
- g) A love from which we can never be separated (8:38–39),
- h) Assurance of His word (chaps. 9–11),

To name some of the more obvious ones... These “mercies” provide not only the basis but also the motivation for worship. **Our Christian worship flows from a manifestation of righteousness that God accomplishes in us.**

John Calvin said, **“that we will never worship with a sincere heart or serve God with unbridled zeal until we properly understand how much we are indebted to God’s mercy.”**

As a response, Paul says to give our bodies. The Greek word for bodies is defined as the whole person, both physical and immaterial. The total attributes that make you a person. This would include your qualities, skills, time, morals, nature, thinking, talents, and use; **the totality of who you are is offered. Worship involves the entire body in service - including the heart, mind and will.** Everything you do, the day-to-day tasks... do them for the Lord!

This means that we should not offer the parts of our body as instruments of wickedness, but instruments of life. **Sin is no longer your master.** We have to give up our sinful ways, our ungodly desires, and our selfish instincts so that we can glorify God. **When you really get it... you completely surrender your entire person, flesh (body) to God. Not an empty ritual of duties.**

Paul is making a point to emphasize sacrifice and dedication even when things get difficult. That is what he defines as spiritual worship. We have a tendency to resist giving our entire person.

I see this scenario being played out with my own daughter. When I have urged my four-year-old daughter to have a bath she puts up a fight. She will say things to her mom like, "I will get in the water... but you can't wash my hair!" When she goes to wash her hair she puts up a fight. She yells and screams in protest. Are we not like that with God?

There may be some things that you are willing to do for God. What are you not willing to do? Maybe because it's hard or it's in the background or it cuts into your personal time. We see this at play right here. "God, I will give my hour or two to do the task that I enjoy. But, don't ask me to serve in the areas that I find difficult." For many that could be children's ministry, serving in the kitchen or in the school at George Jay or fill in the blank. God, I will give some money but don't ask me to talk to my neighbor about you. I don't want to feel awkward or have to go out of my way. If it's easy... I am not sure it's offering much at all. Do you know and understand what is given?

The word worship in this passage comes from a Greek word that is used of the laboring person. It stands for not slavery, but the voluntary undertaking of work. The true worship, the really spiritual worship, is offering everything, because of what God has done for you!

William Barclay says “Real worship is not the offering of elaborate prayers to God; it is not the offering to God of a liturgy, however noble, and a ritual, however magnificent. Real worship is the offering of everyday life to God.”

The term sacrifice means, “giving something up for the sake of something else.” In biblical worship, **God desires something that costs us something... it’s not free.** It could cost us our time, our money, our talents, abilities and desires. **The irony lies in that God desires us to give back to Him and surrender what he has already given to us. Can you surrender back what is already given to you?** Those who make sacrifices for God, worship God because of what He has done in their life. Worship is not passive but active surrender. What we offer may look slightly different because of how God has gifted each of us.

To quote Brian Doerksen, **“Worship is an act of love; the great thing is that no two people express love in exactly the same way. How has God made you to express love? That’s where the power will be!”**

Throughout the Old Testament the verb “worship” in Hebrew means to surrender, to fall down in submission - the way we would humble ourselves before a mighty king. This is how David worshiped in Psalm 95:6.

Now that we have looked at how God desires for us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Secondly, in our worship, God desires for us to be like Him.

2. In our worship, God desires for us to be like Him

Giving your entire self flows into a holy and pleasing act. Worship flows from Christ-like living. Paul says in Romans 12:1, “offer your body as holy and pleasing to Him- this is your spiritual act of worship”. We offer our body as holy.....by being made more like Jesus. We give up our lives for his purposes for faithful living.

The perfect example of living a holy living is seen in the example of Jesus.

- He was obedient to the Father.
- He righted wrongs
- He brought healing.
- Compassionate
- Loving
- Served
- Forgave
- Ultimately, he gave his life.

As you are changed by the gospel you are made more and more like Christ. We are made perfect or clean before God because of Jesus death on the cross if we give our lives to Him. (1 Cor. 6:11; Acts 20:32; 26:18; Heb. 2:11) You move from team that values depravity to the team that values Christ-like living. You move from rejecting God to serving God. As the gospel moves forward in your own life it moves forward in the world. Do you live a life that pleases God?

You have been set free from sin and have become **slaves to righteousness**. Paul says in Romans 6:13-19, “just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.” Are you a slave to Jesus or a slave to something else?

I was at a wedding recently and the pastor asked the bride and groom to look deep into each other’s eyes. “Get a really good look,” he said... “Because you will soon start to look like the other.” As we age there is humorous truth in that. When we spend intimate time with the other you start to take on some of their quirks and values. When we give up our life and spend time with Jesus we start to become like Him. This relationship shapes us. We are also shaped by what we worship.

We are shaped by what we worship.

Whether we like it or not worship goes on in our lives. Matt Redman says, “**Worship is the spiritual part of our surrender, submission and attachment to many things. The worship of money or sex or power or people results in addictive and compulsive behaviors. The staggering truth is that we all are lured into worshipping something or someone other than the living God.**”

Worship money, become a greedy person. Worship power, become a corrupt person. Worship Jesus, become a Christ- like person.

Jeremiah 2:5 says it well, “They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.” To quote D.L. Moody, “**Satan doesn’t care what we worship, as long as we don’t worship God.**” People who worship God will

become more like God. The sad reality is **“Gold has more worshippers than God.”** Said perfectly by Doan Eleanor.

David, the psalmist, had plenty of time to reflect on God. I guess you could say it was one of the fringe benefits of being a herder of sheep. His office was shrouded by a huge sky. His nightly entertainment was the dancing heavens above. Alone and awake, he had lots of time to look up and wonder. Grasping at the endless universe above made his head spin. Looking up, he said, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?” (Ps. 8:3-4)

But when we look to God, everything changes. Matt Redman says, “Intrigued by the night sky, David saw order. Looking up, he was confronted with the Incomprehensible. The Eternal. The Mysterious. The Expansive. The Beautiful. He saw forever black and brilliant light. On the darkest of nights, the stars seemed to stoop to touch him. The blacker the night, the brighter they glowed. The more isolated his location, the closer they appeared.” This is the handiwork of God. We are nothing in comparison to God. When we understand our need for Him, and acknowledge his holiness and power, we worship!

As we have seen, who or what we worship shapes us. In our worship, God desires for us to be like Him. Third, in our worship, God desires for us to renew our mind.

3. In our worship, God desires for us to renew our mind

Paul says in verse 2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

*The message says “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. **Instead, fix your attention on God.** You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”*

Robert Mounce says, “Unfortunately, the power of contemporary culture to “squeeze us into its mold” is greater than we realize! Paul telling his readers to no longer live out the “pattern of this world” (its practices, fashions, priorities, and goals). We have been rescued from “this present evil age” (Gal 1:4) and should therefore no longer conform to its pattern for living. Instead, we should allow God to transform us by giving us a totally new way of looking at things. Our moral consciousness is to be reoriented by the power of the indwelling Spirit.”

Paul is saying that to not conform to the world we must renew our mind. Renewing our mind is an internal process of changing our thinking. Dying to our predisposition to sin. It means, to move away from our desire to fit into the popular mold or doing what feels good in the moment.

The enemy to this process is conformity to the world.

Are we like the world in how we:

1. Spend our time.
2. Fixate on our next experience or vacation.
3. How we use our finances.
4. In what occupies our thinking.
5. How we conduct ourselves when no one is looking.

The desires of our heart reflect what is going on in our thinking.

Do we have things in our life that are above God? After reflecting, we quickly realize we can fall right back into the old patterns of the world.

“Christians have been introduced into the life of the world to come; what a tragedy, then, if they conform to the perishing world they have left.”¹

When you purchase a new computer, you have this expectation that everything will just work as it should. You connect it to the Internet and you have access to unlimited amounts of information. Some users don't understand that others want to infiltrate your system. Click here and your computer will be faster. You have seen pop-ups that say click here and you will get this free product. Or click here and you will win a free trip. By clicking on that email or popup your computer is altered because of something that is installed without your knowledge. Many times they are viruses or what we call malware, which changes the way your computers works. To get the computer back requires a virus checker (a specialist) that sifts through all the files and removes the threat. It changes the way the computer thinks so it can execute the task that we bought it for.

The remedy of not conforming to the world is to change our thinking. The way you think determines your perspectives, attitudes, and actions. Our brain is our control centre that makes these decisions.

And you thought you had an excuse... Often, our thinking can fall into unhealthy patterns that have made their way into our minds and push us away from God. The way we change our thinking is by pouring truth over

¹ Morris, L. (1988). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 435). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

our minds. Allowing truth (like the assurance we talked about last week) to create new patterns in our lives. Some of us are so stubborn that we need more scripture than others. We need to immerse ourselves in the ocean of truth because we are weak thinkers who easily conform to the pattern of the world!

When an impure thought comes into your mind, you don't entertain it but dismiss it. When our thoughts are full of despair or on ourselves, truth steers them back to Him. This can be a daily, hourly, and minute-by-minute undertaking... a constant process.

God desires that we change the way we think. We reprogram our thinking to be more like God. That is worship. We must not fashion ourselves according to this world. We must not follow the majority who do evil. People who worship God live and think differently and it shows.

In summary, in our worship, God desires for us to renew our mind so we do not conform to the world. Lastly, in our worship, we find the will of God.

4. In our worship, we find the will of God

How often have we asked the question, "God what should I be doing with my life? What is your will for me?" Paul says, if you give your entire person in service, live like Christ and do not conform to the pattern of the world by the renewing of your mind... then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. His good, pleasing and perfect will.

We can get easily frustrated with God when we spend time in prayer and we can't figure out His will for our lives. We may even be on our knees

as we seek clear direction for our lives and can't seem to get the answer we want.

In Relevant Magazine, Greg Darley writes, "God reminded me on the bench overlooking the waterfall that He had already given me many insights into His will.

In fact, I was currently reading part of His will for my life. In front of me, my Bible was open to the book of Philippians. I continued reading, but this time, the words on the page jumped out at me. I heard God say, "You want to know what I want you to do? Start by being obedient to what I've already commanded you. I've given you a lot to do. I want you to have my attitude and mindset. I want your life to look like mine."

I looked down and read Philippians 2:14—"Do everything without grumbling or arguing." It was like an explosion of dynamite. In an instant, God's Word burst through the fog of silence. God had spoken clearly about what He desired from my life.

I kept reading and wrote down all the actions and commands I could implement immediately in my life, along with the corresponding Scriptures.

After a few minutes of reading and writing, I had pages of decisions and actions I knew would take a long time to implement. I was overcome with joy that God had spoken!"

"During experiments aboard the space shuttle "Columbia," scientists discovered that there are twenty-six lakes underneath the

Sahara desert. It's heartrending to think of the people who are starving and dying of thirst because these hidden resources have not yet been tapped." Brian Bill

Are you dying of thirst on the surface of your worship because you won't tap into the resources God has given you? As we tap into his word we discover his will. We discover more with a wholehearted surrender to God. His "good" (Essential and valuable), and "pleasing" (acceptable to God, meeting all his requirements), and "perfect" (completely accomplishing its appropriate end) will.

Robert Mounce puts it this way, "The mind renewed enables us to discern the will of God. Released from the control of the world around us, we can come to know what God has in mind for us. We will find that his will is "good, pleasing and perfect." It is good because it brings about moral and spiritual growth. It is pleasing to God because it is an expression of his nature. It is perfect in that no one could possibly improve on what God desires to happen."²

Conclusion:

Have you ever noticed that when we look around at our circumstances, they tend to deflate worship, not inspire it? Looking around we see frustration. We see unfinished tasks. We see imperfection, injustice, and problems. When we tap into the resources that God has given to us we start to see the expressions of right living, which is our worship. **Worship is an obedient response from those who acknowledge**

² Mounce, R. H. (1995). *Romans* (Vol. 27, p. 233). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

the Majesty and Heart of God. We see this as we offer our lives as a living sacrifice in service, we then become more like Jesus. We change our thinking so that we don't conform to the world. In doing so, we find His will for our lives. What have you given to God? Will you let go of your preferences for his purpose in your life? Do you live a life that is the same as the world? Do you need to change your thinking? You start to live with a sense of new life! May you be changed by his spirit and respond with a life of worship.