



the core

the **central truths** of the faith

Discussion Guide

Worship is a lifestyle: Romans 12.1-2

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o When do you “feel” as if you have truly worshipped?
- o Optional: What from the sermon, if anything, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Setting the Stage: *Worship. Most of us have some pretty strong ideas about what it is, what it isn't, and what it should be. Most of these ideas have something to do with the way in which we adore and praise God. What if adoration of God was only one part of the larger worship picture, and a small part at that? What if worship transcended style, preference, or moments of adoration? What if worship was something that encompassed more than what we give, but encompassed who we are? What if worship was simply more than anything we could ever have imagined? What if in our discussions of what worship is and isn't we were truly missing the calling to worship? Would we be willing to think differently, to act differently, to answer the call and worship?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Romans 12.1-2 (*Leader Note:* You may wish to use the *Group Notes* section to provide context.)
- In Romans 1-11, Paul argues that the Gospel transforms our social dimension. In Christ, we become a single, unified people of God. In what ways does the Gospel transform how we daily live? (*Leader Note:* Draw out as many answers as possible.)
- What do you think Paul is trying to say when he encourages people to “offer their bodies as living sacrifices?”
- What might a life offered as a living sacrifice (bodily worship) look like?
- Do you think people find this way of living with God easy or difficult? Can you elaborate?
- What steps might people/churches take to offer bodily worship?
- What about bodily worship do you find the easiest to live out? What do you find to be the most challenging? Can you elaborate?
- How might God be calling you to partner with Him to experience the transformation of the Gospel so that you offer your body in worship to Him in an increasing manner?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Worship is a lifestyle: Romans 12.1-2

Context and Background

Romans: The letter to the house churches in Rome was written by the Apostle Paul to Christ-communities that he did not found and had never visited (Romans 1.11-13). However, that Paul wrote to these churches is not unusual. Paul viewed himself as an Apostle to the Gentiles, and thus responsible for encouraging churches in Gentile areas, even those he did not start (Romans 1.14-17). Some have argued that Romans is Paul's systematic description of his Gospel message. However, the letter of Ephesians rather than Romans is probably a better fit for this description. Romans is actually rooted in a dispute between at least two groups in the Roman house churches (Romans 14.1-15.13). Paul is writing to these churches in an attempt to bring unity between them. He does this by explaining how the Gospel transforms social relationships. All people, regardless of background, are sinful and in need of God's gracious redemption through the person of Jesus (Romans 1-8). This redemptive act of God redefines social boundaries and characteristics of people groups so that there is only one unified people of God (Romans 9-11). If the Gospel redefines the social dimension, then the question that remains is how are those who are God's people to live? Paul shifts to answer these questions in ways that are both general and specific to the churches in Rome with chapter 12. Beginning with this section, Paul describes how God's people are to live, both with God and one another. This living with God and one another might be described as a "bodily life," one that encompasses all aspects of physical humanity. In response, Paul does not allow the Romans simply to move to spiritual concepts of life as God's people. Rather, he seeks to root them in the normal comings and goings of life as the practical outworking of what it means to be God's people.

Worship: For many people today, worship is special time in which God's people adore and praise Him. This definition is drawn from the English roots of the word worship which means to ascribe worth to an object of affection. This adoration and praise is usually confined to such items as songs, prayer, and Scripture readings, though it may incorporate other elements. However, in Scripture, worship is much broader than these items or even the adoration of God. The words that are used for worship in the Old and New Testaments refer to both cultic acts and obedience to the voice of God. That is, worship includes such things as religious services, but it is actually much bigger than these. It includes one's daily life lived in obedience to God's commands (Deuteronomy 10.12-13). Jesus himself points to this truth in his discussion with the woman at the well in John 4. In this discussion, Jesus indicated that worship was something that transcended cultic acts (John 4.23-24). Likewise, Paul seems to have the same understanding. In the opening words to the churches in Rome, Paul states that his service—worship in the language of the New Testament—is the preaching of the Gospel, and that this has little to do with external cultic acts but is spiritual (Romans 1.9; See also Philippians 3.3). In the same vein, in Romans, Paul argues that the Gospel transforms one's social dimension. In this transformed standing, worship actually becomes the way one lives their daily life with God and others (Romans 12.1-2). Therefore, worship is much bigger than what we typically call "worship." Limiting our understanding of worship to things such as "worship services" can actually become a means of avoiding what God views as true worship. Further, debating what is or isn't proper during our "worship services" misses the point of worship, as true worship has little to do with matters of style and musical preference. Rather, worship involves bodily action given in devotion to God and others.

The Text

Worship is life (Romans 12.1): Paul has just completed his discussion of how the Gospel transforms one's social dimensions. In God's sight, all are separated from Him and in need of His gracious redemption (Romans 1-8). Those who have received God's gracious redemption find themselves in a new social standing with God and others. They are now a single, unified people of God (Romans 9-11). Now Paul turns to discuss how the people of God should live. He begins by noting that life is lived first and foremost in light of what God has done. Life is defined by the Gospel, God's mercies. This life is one in which God's people offer Him their bodies as living sacrifices. Paul uses cultic language here that would have been easily understood. In the ancient world the proper way to approach a god was with a sacrifice. A sacrifice was something a person possessed that was given completely to the god for the purpose of being destroyed. In this destruction/sacrifice, life for the person was achieved. The same thought is here in the text. The only difference is that one's bodily existence is the sacrifice. Paul is referring here to all aspects of one's life. However, in the offering of one's life, Paul is envisioning a transformation, a death to the normal way of living so that true life might be found. Paul states that the offering of one's bodily existence is actually what God defines as true worship. Some translators use the phrase "spiritual worship." However, this translation misses Paul's point. The word he uses refers to that which is essential to the true nature of something. Thus, Paul is basically saying that people's true created nature is to give their bodies to God. Living connected with and for God is what worship really is.

A worshipful life is a transformed life (Romans 12.2): Offering one's bodily existence to God is nothing short of allowing the Gospel which transforms one's social dimension to work out in how one relates to God and others. The practical application of this thought is that God's people cannot conform to cultural standards governing life. Rather, they must be counter-cultural. However, becoming a counter-cultural people takes effort, but not effort focused on behaviors. Paul encourages effort to be focused on changing patterns of thought and belief. In changing the way they understand God, others, and life God's people begin to discover that their actions follow and that collectively they are living as God truly desires.

Application: Worship has been one of the most hotly debated subjects among churches for the past forty years. By and large, these debates have focused on something called the "worship event" or "service." Churches have argued about what is and isn't appropriate worship of God. That is, our focus has been on what is most pleasing to God, what adores Him the most. Paul would have been baffled by such debates for such discussions severely limit what worship is. Worship transcends issues of style and musical preference. Worship transcends the single hour we set aside to "adore God." True worship is found in the offering of our bodily existence to God. We worship as we engage with God in others in ways that keep with who God created us to be. We worship when the realities of the Gospel work their way out into every aspect of our life. Anything less, any other discussion is a means of avoiding what God defines as true worship.