

How would you define “worship”?

When I think of what worship is, the first thing that comes to mind is another question: ‘What isn’t worship?’ All of life, all our affections and relationships . . . worship is all of these things and it’s found in every moment of every day. We are human beings, beings that were born to worship. By this I don’t mean that we were meant to spend our whole life in a long church service. What I mean is that our lives and our loves point to something and someone greater than ourselves. If each of our lives is like a fire, the smoke rises to God. Our lives give off an aroma to God and to everyone around us.

I can give a simple definition of ‘worship’ but defining anything comes with limits. One definition I have used is this: *Worship is the loving surrender of all we are to all of who God is.* It’s about love and it’s about surrender and ultimately it’s about God.

Worship is first. . . .

always has been

always will be.

It’s the way we were made.

. . . . it is the highest privilege and pleasure in the Kingdom of God, and is the response of our lives to the greatest commandment in Scripture:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV)

Worship is not only first . . . it is first love, as the greatest commandment so clearly underscores. Worship is first and foremost about who we love, not only about what we believe.

In the greatest commandment we are not exhorted to ‘believe in the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind’ etc. That brings to mind this scripture from James 2:19:

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.

The demons believe in God . . . but they don’t trust God . . they don’t obey God . . . and most importantly they don’t love God. We are called to love, because as human beings made in the image of God, love is our first call. Love is not a house built solely out of words . . . though words are powerful and beautiful and important. Love is a house that begins with the architecture and design of our desire and then rises and is built from the materials of our actions. Desire leads to action, and repeated actions become habits (for good or ill) and these habits become patterns woven throughout our life adding up to the primary message our life conveys. Annie Dillard said “The way we live our days is the way we live our lives.” We become

the sum total of our desires, actions, habits and patterns. We become what we love. We become like what we worship.

How did you explore your vision/calling as a worship leader?

This started in my youth. When I was a teenager I felt a profound call from God. I was heading in one direction playing basketball with a plan to start a business and make as much money as I could. One day I had a profound visitation from the Spirit of God in my bedroom. I sensed God calling me to lay down my plans and dreams and embrace his dream for my life. (As I said before, worship is surrender to a loving invitation from God.) In the days and weeks after that experience I found myself drawn to pick up a guitar and begin to make music in my musical mother tongue (folk-rock) that was spiritual and emotional in nature. When many of the high school students around me were partying, I was spending my weekends with a few good friends worshipping and making music to God. I provided some leadership to these times, and then eventually I began to lead in other home settings and then eventually at larger church gatherings. It was a natural progression based on a spiritual call. I'm a shy introvert, so the public role I have is based on a spiritual vision and call, not on a natural personality type who seeks the stage. In my childhood, my parents can attest to how much I tried to avoid the stage and any type of speaking or singing in public. They have observed what I do now and know that it is a miracle (the confidence to do it) and yet there are still observable steps I took to grow in it.

What is for you the most amazing about God's character?

That's a hard question to answer. Perhaps the best answer I can give is I don't know yet. How can we fully know God's character when from our vantage point we 'see through a glass darkly'. Every description we can give of God must be given with a healthy dose of humility because each of us has such limits to our knowledge and experience. Just as science is constantly making new discoveries about the mystery of life and the universe in which we live, so we will continue to learn and know God better throughout eternity.

However if I had to pick one it would be *God's faithfulness*. We live in a world that is moving more and more towards unfaithfulness. Marriages don't last and we all pay the price. (I'm so blessed to be married now for 33 years!) God is that faithful anchor in our lives, and through everything we experience, he remains faithful.

How can we keep in a spiritual attitude of worship during our every-day-life?

The most important thing is to realize that worship IS our every-day-life. Yes, it is important to gather weekly as a community of faith and worship (by that I mean spending time singing, praying, listening, receiving communion etc.). The best way to keep in a spiritual attitude every day is to "*be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from*

the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Eph 5:18-20 NIV

There's a lot packed into that scripture. Singing is so important. Singing Psalms is vital . . . which means singing not just our happy emotions but our sad and difficult emotions too. (The Psalms are 40% lament) Giving thanks is important too . . . gratitude is the pathway to joy.

What are the greatest challenges, when you think about the combination “worship” and “business”?

The greatest challenge is the combination of worship and business. (And at some places worship has become big business!) Yet this tension is present in most of human life. We need to constantly work at finding the right balance in how we relate to people and the earth on which we live while we make a living. My personal story is that I haven't focused much on the business side – I've just tried to do the next thing I feel led to do, and do it at a pace where our family thrives. I could have sold much more music (and perhaps made more money) if I would have accepted more invitations, but then my wife and children would not have thrived. Life is found in a good balance of our yes and no, of rest and work.

What is your perspective on worship in the future?

I have hopes . . . hopes that we will broaden and deepen our song selection. I hope we will embrace 'Emotionally Healthy Spirituality'. I hope we will have the courage to include the voice of lament and the songs that rise from those who suffer. We still have a long way to go to deeply embrace truth and health. I hope we continue to write better songs (and keep on singing the best songs from the past!)

The songs we sing are so important because they put truth into our back-up hard drive (that's the part of the brain that remembers while other things are forgotten.) When we suffer (and we all will eventually) having songs about things that matter (like our relationship with God and each other) will help sustain us through difficult seasons.

One of the favourite parts of my life currently is mentoring and training some of the next generation of worship leaders and songwriters. I do that wherever I can and wherever I go; I also do that as the director of the Music & Worship Arts program at Prairie College in Alberta, Canada. My students there study with me for a focused period of a couple of years and then those that show promise as songwriters emerge with a professionally produced EP of original songs. I love hearing what the next generation is writing and how they want to express their worship and their songs about life and love.