

STUDY 2

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION

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Seek God.

Seeking God is a foundational part of worship. As we deepen our understanding and practice of worship, we are drawn into a closer relationship with God.

Writer Bio

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A BIBLE STUDY ON THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP

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If cats have nine lives as the old wife's tale suggests, many church goers would have to admit that they have at least two. There's the life lived day after day in their workplace, social circles, and family activities. Then, there's the life lived at church; hands folded reverently, songs sung softly, and their almost-new Bible in their lap.

The truth is, even people who don't think about it that way would have to admit there is some truth to that description. Though such a life can be comfortable, it doesn't seem to rise to the abundant life Jesus promised His disciples.

Worship—the way the Bible teaches it—changes this paradigm. Once we understand that worship is more than the songs we sing before the sermon or the offering we give when the plates pass, the dots start connecting.

The Greek word for "worship," *proskuneō*, means "to encounter God and praise Him."

Therefore, worship is a lifestyle, not a once per week event. As Christ followers, our goal is to encounter God everyday, in all circumstances. We are to live what we believe in church, on our jobs and in our homes.

Life—the true abundant life we are called to live—awaits those who will pursue a life of worship that connects our pews to office cubicles and our houses to mission fields. Our call to make disciples begins with a call to worship. The journey starts right here.

Romans 12:1 reminds us, "... in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship." The pages of Scripture in this study will reveal the One we are to worship, and also the way we are to worship. As we deepen our understanding and practice of worship, we are drawn into a closer relationship with God.

THE FOCUS OF OUR WORSHIP

Leader pages on pp. 130-133

THE POINT:
ONLY GOD DESERVES
OUR WORSHIP.

ISAIAH 40:21-31

²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not considered the foundations of the earth?

²² God is enthroned above the circle of the earth; its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like thin cloth and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He reduces princes to nothing and makes judges of the earth like a wasteland.

²⁴ They are barely planted, barely sown, their stem hardly takes root in the ground when he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind carries them away like stubble.

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²⁵ "To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal?" asks the Holy One.

²⁶ Look up and see! Who created these? He brings out the stars by number; he calls all of them by name. Because of his great power and strength, not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Jacob, why do you say, and Israel, why do you assert, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my claim is ignored by my God"?

²⁸ **Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never becomes faint or weary; there is no limit to his understanding.**

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²⁹ He gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰ Youths may become faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall, ³¹ but those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint.

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Holy One (v. 25)—Hebrew has no definite article before Holy One, indicating it is a personal name, not merely a descriptor. Holy describes God’s separateness from all that is unholy.

He calls . . . name (v. 26)—God knows the name, essential nature, characteristics, and function of each star.

Jacob . . . Israel (v. 27)—Recalls how Jacob the swindler was changed to Israel, "the one who wrestled with God" (Gen. 32:22-32).

Will renew . . . (v. 31)—"exchange" or "replace." To renew one’s strength, then, means that they will substitute the Lord’s strength for their own.

WHY DOES GOD DESERVE OUR WORSHIP?

When it comes to gospel music celebrities, Israel Houghton and New Breed are certainly well known. In fact, they are six-time Grammy Award winners. One of their most celebrated albums, *Alive in South Africa*, captures the most amazing worship song written by Erasmus Mutanbira, from Zimbabwe; “Alpha and Omega.” The song acknowledges that God alone is Alpha and Omega and worthy to be praised.

Israel Houghton and New Breed had it right. The truth is, our Creator made us to find hope and purpose in life through worshiping Him alone. No one else is worthy or can give us hope.

In the book of Isaiah, we see Israel learning this lesson the hard way. Hopefully, we can make the right choice from the start and worship the Lord. Let’s learn how we can worship the only One who can rescue us, the only One who deserves our praise.

God Is Incomprehensible //

Isaiah 40:21-24

Worship has a starting place. All religions practice worship but those attempts start with manmade appeals to a deity in hopes we can be helped

somehow. If we can do enough, pray enough, or give enough, we’ll eventually convince a god we don’t know to make our lives better. The problem with that understanding of worship is the reality that if we start with us, the god we serve will be a mere reflection of ourselves. In that paradigm, the classic hymn “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” would need to be sung like this, “Turn our eyes upon ourselves”! The only true starting place is the Lord.

We don’t worship Him to get Him to respond to us—that’s what religion does. We worship Him because of who He is and all He has done for us. The Lord is always where worship begins. We see it in chapter 6 of the prophecy in Isaiah’s own words: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of his robe filled the temple” (v. 1).

When God is seen, He is worshiped. Since seeing God is where worship begins, then the help we need is found in understanding the nature of the God we worship.

In Isaiah 40:21, God was calling His people to worship Him by asking four great questions. He’s not looking for information. He was focusing Israel’s attention. Each question brought Israel closer to seeing God and to worship.



THE POINT: ONLY GOD DESERVES OUR WORSHIP.

- “Do you not know?”
- “Have you not heard?”
- “Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?”
- “Have you not considered the foundations of the earth?”

We can hear the point God was making in these questions. Israel was without excuse. Everything they needed to know about God had been revealed to them. Yet in their stubbornness, they returned to their idols and rejected the peace God offered. Despite every offense, God lovingly orchestrated the plan to redeem His covenant people—a plan of captivity and judgment, freedom and restoration. Above all came the promise of Immanuel—God who is with us.

They should have seen. They should have known. Every question reiterates the point. What about us? How much more have we seen? How much more have we heard? Like Isaiah, we worship God when we see His power revealed. The prophecy still rings true today.

Worship begins by looking at God and seeing glimpses of the invisible and infinite. In this passage, Isaiah gave us several images to consider:

- We see the God whose power made the world in the beginning of everything.
- We see the God who is Ruler of all and whose throne has no equal.
- We see the God who is so big, He causes all the world as we know it to seem small by comparison.
- We see the God whose authority and might transcends every prince on earth. No power can approach His greatness. God is superior to all.

Do you not know? Have you not seen? God is all powerful and deserves our praise.

HOW DOES GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE MOVE YOU TO WORSHIP HIM?

God Is Incomparable //

Isaiah 40:25-28

God had more questions for Israel, and these questions compelled Israel to keep dialing in their focus on God. But there's another aspect of Isaiah's description of God's power that undergirds all of it. Not only did Israel need to see God's work, but they also were



DIGGING DEEPER WORSHIP'S FIRST MENTION

The act of worship is essential to a believer's life. In fact, worship is extremely important to God. He reveals its significance throughout biblical history. We can gain a deeper understanding of worship if we examine the first mention of the term “worship” in Scripture, Genesis 22:5. The passage gives the account of Abraham's legendary act of faith, where he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac as an offering in obedience to God. In Genesis 22:5, Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we'll come back to you.” This first mention is significant because it emphasizes Abraham's reverence and submission to God. It also reveals his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son. This act of worship is a powerful example of devotion to God.

Reflect on Abraham's depth of worship. How does his example encourage you to worship more deeply?

confronted with His unique nature. No other god created it all. No other god holds it all. No other god rules it all. If another with this power existed, our worship would rightly be divided between the two. But God isn't one of two or of many—He is One. The only One.

Isaiah didn't discover this on his own. Return to Isaiah 6 and read the word of Isaiah's own testimony about what he saw: God on His throne with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim were encircling the throne and shouting back and forth to each other, "Holy, holy, holy" (v. 3). Their three-fold declaration is more than a clever way to start a hymn; they're an explicit description of this aspect of God's nature.

Holiness is not only a pious lifestyle in the ways we tend to think of holiness. In its simplest form, the word "holy" means "other." The angels were announcing with clarity that the God on this throne was the only One like Him. No wonder Isaiah adds "Holy One" (40:25) to the growing list of descriptive names given to God! He is like no other!

Think about God as Creator. He wasn't following anyone's else's plan. He didn't consult or consider any other design. God alone created. He didn't go to another place to find the ingredients either. From His own word it all came to be (Gen. 1).

Isaiah went on to say that God not only created it all, but He also never tires of sustaining His creation by His power. There's a theological belief that struggles with this point. Deists believe that God exists and that He created it all, but then left creation to run on its own accord. God simply started everything and then walked away from His creation. Isaiah didn't proclaim it that way.

God made the stars and knows them by name. He even counts them! The implication is that a God who would know the stars and care for them also knows us and cares for us. He understands everything about His creation and never grows weary of caring for all of it.

WHAT ABOUT GOD'S CREATION LEADS YOU TO WORSHIP HIM?

That would have been a wonderful history lesson if Isaiah had stopped there, but there's more.

God not only was all that, but He still is all that! God is worthy of our worship because He has not changed. He is the everlasting God, the One whose power is undiminished. Everything He has ever been, He still is! God is all powerful and everlasting. He is worthy of our praise!

God Is Incapable of Being Unloving //

Isaiah 40:29-31

God has all power. He has the right to rule His creation. God is holy and unrivaled by any other. He has all authority and holds everything together in His hand. God revealed Himself in His creation and through His word. The psalmist captured it perfectly: "The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord" (Ps. 24:1).



If Isaiah's prophecy stopped in the first half of Isaiah 40:28, we would be no better off hearing it. Yes, we would understand we have a Maker, and that we belong to Him, but how could we worship Him? Why would we worship Him? He would only be feared and avoided at all costs. His power would drive us away. Rather than longing to know our God, we would only try to appease Him.

Verse 29 continues with two grace-filled words: "He gives." In the same way, God initiated creation with His word. He initiated His relationship with man through His pursuit of him. He initiated our salvation by working His redemptive plan through Immanuel (Isa. 9). And God initiates our worship by giving us His strength.

THE POINT: ONLY GOD DESERVES OUR WORSHIP.

The apostle Paul expressed this profound truth at the close of a beautiful hymn found in Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."

- "From him"—God is our origin.
- "Through him"—God is our source and strength.
- "To him"—God is the object of our worship.

Isaiah understood the process of drawing near to God in worship begins with repentance, continues with forgiveness, and leads to mission (Isa. 6). The work that God did in Isaiah's heart was a precursor of the greater work God would do for Judah. God revealed Himself, Judah saw Him and became aware of sin, and confession was followed by the cleansing fire. Then the voice of God was heard and complete submission to God ensued.

HOW DOES WORSHIP STRENGTHEN US?

God deserves our worship as we are drawn in by His love. When we worship Him, He gives us strength. We can soar. We can run. We can worship.

DID YOU KNOW?

God, the sovereign Creator and Savior of the world has attributes that He shares with His people and attributes that He alone possesses that separates Him from His creation. Those attributes are called "incommunicable." Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence are a few of the incommunicable attributes of God. God also has "communicable" attributes He does share with His people to a degree. Love, mercy, wisdom, and knowledge are some of God's attributes that we have the capacity to reflect. Because God created us in His image and redeemed us, we have the capacity to reflect His character through the transforming power of His Word.

Biblical Truth: God's attributes should bring us great comfort. There is no place where He is not present, unaware, or not in control. Nothing can surprise Him and nothing can defeat Him.

How will knowing God's attributes impact your faith during difficult times? How will it impact your worship?

LIVE IT

What is our appropriate response to God's wondrous acts in and around our lives?

Responding to God in worship brings hope to the hopeless, comfort to the broken, and healing to the soul. In despair, we can find hope when we focus on God and respond to Him in worship. The starting place is God's revelation of Himself to all who want to know Him. Choose an application below:

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- **The Starting Place.** The worship journey begins with seeing God for who He is and responding to His offer of forgiveness in Christ. How has God revealed Himself to you? What attributes of God draw you into worship? Take note of those things as you worship this week.
- **The Growing Place.** Read Colossians 1:15-20. List all the attributes of Jesus found in these verses describing the essence of Christ. Worship Jesus Christ this week by praying through this passage, thanking Him for who He is.
- **The Sowing Place.** How can your worship point the way to the God who loves and gives grace to those who will seek Him? Begin praying for them by name and asking God to open the opportunity to point them to Christ, the only place where true hope and comfort are found.

DAILY READINGS

1. THE LORD OF NO LIMITS // ISAIAH 40:21-24; PSALM 24:1-2

"The earth and everything in it, the world and inhabitants, belong to the Lord; for he laid its foundation on the seas and established it on the rivers" (Ps. 24:1-2). In our session scripture, we meet Isaiah who is speaking to God's people who were weary and focused on their circumstance. Isaiah offers God's people a new perspective with thought provoking questions to challenge their thinking. Are you moving through life with limited perspective? Perhaps being reminded of who God is and where we should put our focus and worship is helpful to us as well. Do you not know? Have you not heard? God has no limits.

God is still a great God who sits on the throne and remains in control of the world we live in.

2. A GOD LIKE NO OTHER // ISAIAH 40:25-28; PSALM 86:8

There is a worship song that reminds us that there is no one like our God. That we can search forever and still will not find anyone like the God we serve. The Lord reveals through the prophet Isaiah that because of the Lord's great power and strength not one of the stars in the sky is missing and He calls them by name. If the Lord knows the stars, far out of our reach, do you believe He knows us full well? He is worthy of all our worship. What other person can create a nation with such detail, and with much care and admiration, form His precious beings?

Psalms 86:8 reminds us, "LORD, there is no one like you among the gods, and there are no works like yours."

3. GOD'S LOVE IS POWERFUL // ISAIAH 40:29-31; ROMANS 8:37-39

Who do you trust the most? The person you can always depend on, the one person you think of when something comes up and you are certain they will take care of it because they have, they did, and they will. God wants to be that person in your life because

he can, he has, and he will. Our faith journey begins with understanding God's love for us. I John 4:16 tells us, "And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him." While people will disappoint us, God remains the same, forever.

Romans 8:39 says nothing created can separate us from the love of God.

4. TRUST IS MY WORSHIP// ISAIAH 40:29-31;12:2

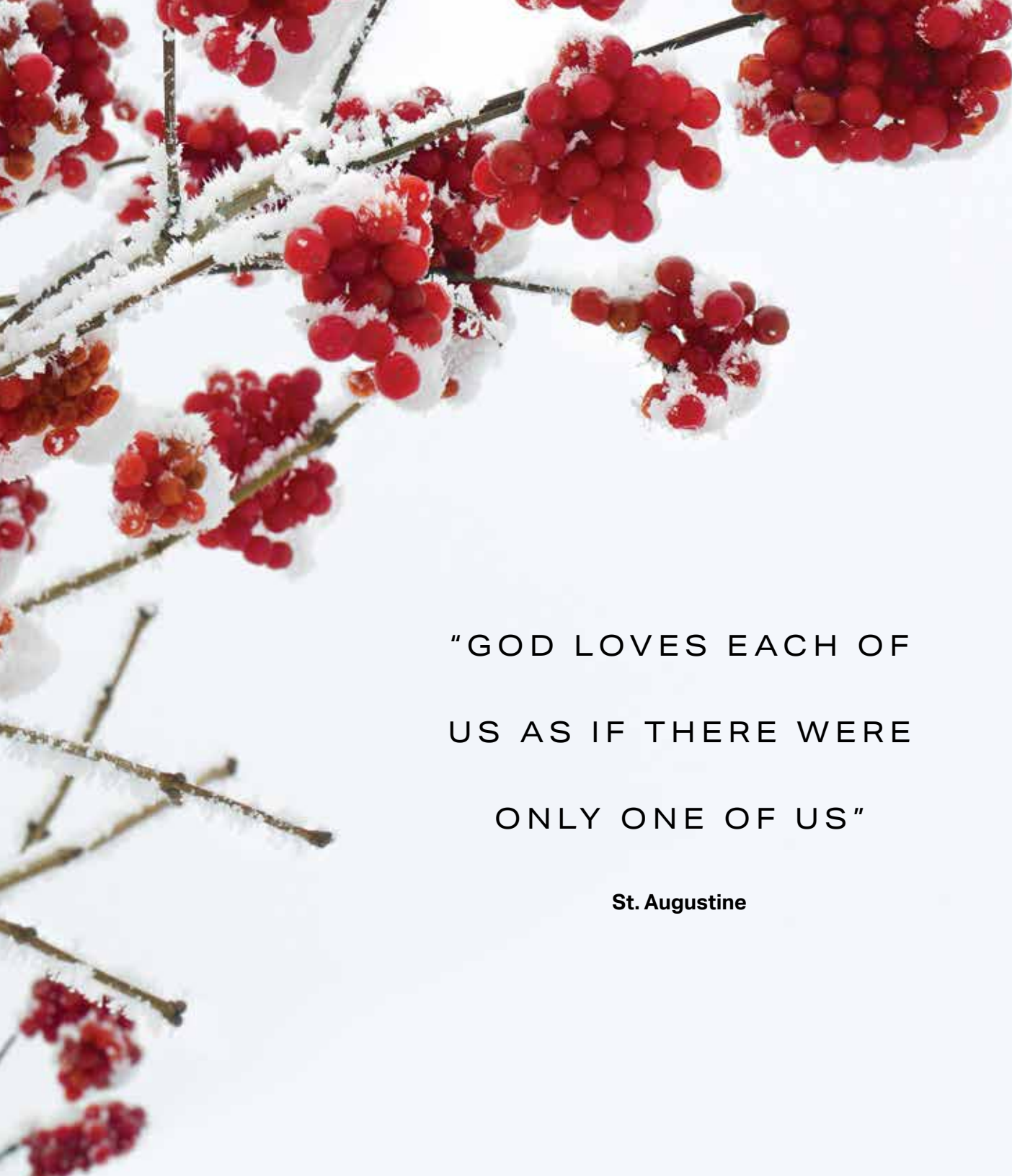
Because of God's love for us we can approach Him in prayer in whatever condition we are in or life situation we may find ourselves. Affirm your trust in God and say in your worship, "I trust You, Lord". Giving Him praise for His everlasting love, even if we are uncertain and working to see beyond what is in front of us. Isaiah 40:29 reminds us that "He gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless" and the chapter goes on to tell us that we will stumble and fall but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength. Trust God and do not be afraid.

Isaiah 12:2 states, "God is my salvation; I will trust him and not be afraid, for the Lord is my strength and my song."

5. CREATED TO SOAR! // ISAIAH 40:31; JOHN 16:33

As a parting gift, my co-worker gave me a picture of an eagle flying over a forest. The eagle was clearly visible, and the top peak of the trees was only captured. I always admired the freedom and intentionality of the eagle. Doing what he was created to do, aware but not bothered by any dangers may lie beneath its flight. Scripture tells us that we will have trouble in this life, like the threats of a forest to an eagle. We are reminded in Isaiah 40:31 that our trust in the Lord renews our strength that we will soar on wings like eagles.

When we are intentional about our trust in the Lord the result is renewing, soaring, running, and walking in God's purpose without becoming weary or faint.



"GOD LOVES EACH OF
US AS IF THERE WERE
ONLY ONE OF US"

St. Augustine