

# Worship Series #4 'A Definition of Worship'

by A.W. Tozer

---

*The purpose of worship is to feel in the heart and express in some manner a humbling, but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder in the presence of God.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 8:1, Psalm 45:11, John 1:1

**Topics:** "Redemption", "Worship"

---

## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes that worship is the primary purpose for which humanity was created, highlighting that through sin, we lost our ability to worship God. He explains that true worship involves a heartfelt expression of humility, awe, and love towards God, who is both a mystery and a personal being. Tozer argues that redemption through Christ restores our capacity to worship, elevating us beyond our original state. He defines worship as an act that transcends mere rituals, calling believers to engage deeply with the essence of God. Ultimately, Tozer urges the church to return to authentic worship, moving beyond superficial practices to a genuine relationship with the Lord of all life.

---

## Transcript

"A Definition of Worship"

October 20, 1957

Now, let me read what the Holy Ghost said through the mouth of the prophet David. Psalm 8, O Lord, Our Lord, O Jehovah Our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth. Who hath set Thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has Thou ordained strength. Because of thine enemies, Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Thy heavens, and the work of Thy fingers, the moon, the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the Son of Man that thou visitest him? But thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Jehovah our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!. And there is that verse in Psalm 45:11, which I have used every night on this series, "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty. He is thy Lord, worship thou Him.

And I have been developing a thesis. It is that God made us to worship. That is why we were created. Everything has its reason for being here. We have this reason that we might worship the Father Almighty,

maker of heaven and earth. And we sinned and lost the glory and fell; and the light went out in our hearts. And we stopped worshipping God and set our affections on things below. But God sent His only begotten Son. He was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, and rose the third day from the dead, and sitteth at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens in order that He might restore us again to worship. Indeed, not only restore us again to worship, but put us so much higher, as much higher as Christ is higher than Adam. For all we could do in Adam was to be equal to Adam. But in Christ, He raises us until we shall be like Him. So that actually redemption is an improvement upon creation.

Now, what is it to worship? Usually, I can't find definitions; I am unable to define them. I don't know anybody that said what I want to say. Probably, somebody did say it and say it better. But I define the word worship as I see it. It probably is an imperfect definition, but it is close and it's what my heart said, that to worship is to feel in the heart. Now to feel in the heart, not to strike a certain pose necessarily, and not to go through a form of a word necessarily, but to feel in the heart and express in some appropriate manner. It may be through a form of words. It may be through song or the sounding of the Scriptures, the sound of the reading of the Scriptures. It may be in awesome silence. It may be in loud praise. But, it is to feel in the heart and express in some manner, a humbling, a humbling. There's no pride in worship. Never.

A fellow who leaps up when he's announced, rushes over, slaps the pulpit and begins to talk fast, he's not worshipping. He belongs on Broadway, not in a pulpit. A humbling, to feel in the heart and express a humbling, but delightful sense of admiring awe, and astonished wonder, and overwhelming love in the Presence of that most ancient mystery, that unspeakable Majesty which the philosophers have called the *mysterium tremendum*, but which the prophets call, the Lord our God.

Now, that is the definition which I have given for worship. And it is for this reason that we are redeemed. We are not redeemed that we might not drink, though the redeemed man will not be a drinker. We are not redeemed that we might not smoke, though the redeemed man is not likely to smoke, unless he's been brought up in an atmosphere where he doesn't know any better. I think some Christians have used the weed because they've been brought up in an atmosphere where they never were taught anything else and they love God and puff their pride. If that shocks any of you are hyper fundamentalist, it's a good for you to get all shook up. Well, that's true. I believe it's true, nevertheless.

But God does not redeem us that He might stop our smoking, though He certainly will get the fire out, that kind of fire if we are redeemed. And He doesn't save us that we might escape hell, though we will escape hell. For we shall not perish but have everlasting life. But He redeems us that we might worship again. That we might take our place again, even on earth, with the angels in heaven, and the beasts, and the living creatures. And we might feel in our heart and express in our own way, that humbling, but nevertheless, delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overwhelming love in the presence of that Ancient Mystery, that unspeakable Majesty, the Ancient of Days.

Now my brethren, that's a definition. And I want you to notice, as you probably have, that I had said "that, that, that." Why did I not say He? Why did I say "that" most Ancient Mystery, that unspeakable Majesty? Why did I not say He instead of that? Because the human heart in its present state, in the presence of mystery, always says some thing before it says some one.

In the book of 1 John, I'll notice that later, but I wanted to call attention to it now. The Holy Ghost says, That which was from the beginning. That which we have heard. That which we have seen with our eyes.

That which we have looked upon and our hands have handled and the Word of Life. For the Life was manifested and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that Eternal Life, that Eternal Life which was with the Father and was manifest unto us. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto to you.

Now, that was an inspired apostle speaking, and he said, that, that, that, which, which, not who, whom, He, but "that which." And in the presence of the Overarching Mystery, the human heart reaches up and leans out and feels and says, "some thing." And it always says some thing before it can say some one. Why did John say "that" instead of He? Because, at the root of human thought, there is an "it." In the root in human thought there is that, that. The human heart searches for the original substance, for being, for empathy.

Do you remember the little word *essentia* in Latin, which means to be actual being. And it's this the human heart struggles for. In the midst of the whirling waters of humanity and sin and time and space, man's heart struggles for the rock of being. The rock of *essentia* of the essential, that actual being. And our fathers knew that when they talked about the substance of God, or when they talked about the essence of God, or when they said that the sun was of the essence of the Father, or when they said, the Spirit was of the same substance as the Father and the Son. Back to the personality, back of the "He" was the "That" which was with the Father. And then as we go on, God's personality emerges, as God manifests Himself. But the first thrust of the human heart out, the first leap of the human spirit out of the swirling waters is for that rock of being, where he says, "that which was with the Father." And as we reason and pray and meditate and read the Word of God, "that" becomes He. He says, When you pray, say our Father which art in heaven.

There lived once in the 17th century. A man by the name of Blaise Pascal. Pascal was probably the greatest mind of the 17th century, and I personally think the greatest mind France ever produced, though I am probably not in position to pronounce on that. It would take a great deal of scholarship to say for certain. But this man goes down in history and is found in all the books and in the encyclopedias and in the histories of science and mathematics as probably the greatest thinker of the 17th century. He was a scientist. He was a mathematician, and he was a philosopher. He didn't write much, but what he wrote has been seminal. It has come like the seed of God in the minds of men. Well, this man astonish the learned world by his works on mathematics, particularly geometry, when he was only in his early 20s.

But later on, Pascal became interested in theology, and then found God and became a Christian. And while he went on with His scientific work, he began to write about God and Christ and redemption and revelation. He wrote with such wondrous clarity and insight that he startled the learned of the universities of his time. And Pascal wrote a little testimony, and he folded that testimony up and put it in close to his heart. And all his life he carried it here close to his heart. And I think died with it close to his heart. And this is only part of it. It isn't very long, but I'm giving you only part of it. A little of it's written in Latin and the rest was translated into English and here it is. Pascal said, from about half past ten at night, to about half after midnight, fire. He cuts it off there. He doesn't go on. He just cuts it off and then prays, O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers, nor the wise. Security, security, feeling joy, peace, God of Jesus Christ, thy God shall be my God. Imagine one of the greatest minds of the last 1000 years carrying this against his heart. Forgetfulness of the world and of all, save God. He can be found only in the ways taught in the Gospel. O Righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee, joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. He kept that in against his heart while he studied the heavens and wrote his great books. But he repudiated the God of the thinker and of the philosopher, and sought the God and Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ who can be found only in the ways of the gospel. Fire, Fire, he said, from 10:30 to 12:30, for His sake, I repudiate the world.

My brethren there was worship. In Luke 2:11, the Holy Ghost said, or the angel said, it was all God's revelation. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord. Now comes the bliss and wonder of revelation and manifestation. And to the thirsting, searching mind that is crying for that, and its substance and essence and being, the angels sing, behold, there is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. He is thy Lord, worship thou Him.

Now, God has given us this object of our worship. He is person, but He's also Being. He is One, but He's also that, that Ancient Mystery, that unutterable Majesty in whose presence angels tremble and the creatures that have gazed for centuries on the sea of fire, fold their wings and cry, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. He is Lord of all. I want to speak of only two things of which He is Lord this night. I'll finish it two weeks from tonight if I can. I think I will be able to.

Well, He is Lord of all, and you will find that over in the book of Acts. He is Lord of all, said the man Peter. And He is the Lord of all Being. And that line is borrowed out of a hymn which we're going to sing later. But He is the Lord of all Being. What I've said tonight is just as orthodox as Augustine, and just as evangelical as Dwight Moody. So don't imagine because I'm using language you're not familiar with, that I am off the deep end somewhere. But He is Lord of all Being. That is, He's the Lord of not all being. That would have been a poor, cheap way to say, Lord of all beings, a kind of boss over the beings. No, He's that, but that wasn't what the man meant, nor what he said, He is the Lord of all Being. He is the Lord of all the concept of being. He's the Lord of all possibility of being. He is that and that is He. And He's the Lord of all actual existence. This is the Lord.

And so my friends, when we worship Him, we encompass all science and all philosophy. You know it, all science and all philosophy. Science is great, philosophy is greater, theology is greater still, and worship is greater than all. For worship goes back of what science can go, back of where human thought can penetrate, and back of all the wordings of theology, and back to the reality. And when the Christian gets on his knees, I've said before and repeat, that he's having a meeting at the summit. He can't get beyond that. There isn't an archangel that can go higher than he can go. There isn't a cherub that can burn his way higher than he can go. For he is worshipping that Awful Mystery, that Overwhelming Majesty, in humbling, but delightful love. He's worshipping his God.

And so I tell you, that when we're called to be Christians, we're simply not called only to give up a few little things and to be saved from doing a few bad things. All of that is, simply; it's what a bird is to a Spring day. It's what a swallow is to the Summer. And one swallow doesn't make a Summer. Neither does giving up beer make a Christian. The swallow will come with the Summer, and the giving up of all this trash will come with the Christian's new birth. He's been born again that he might push through, and press in and pass the blood sprinkled way, and find that after which the minds of men sought and sought. Whether it be the most superstitious creature that knows nothing, eat human flesh and wears no clothes and cries after that some thing. Whether it be the learned theologian, He leads us into that. For "That" is none other than He who came and was born of the Virgin Mary, to suffer under Pontius Pilate. He is no lately come One. No new One to add to Buddha and Mohammedan, Zoroaster. He goes back of all.

So, no Christian ever has to be ashamed and say I'm no philosopher. Don't be foolish, you are. You say, I'm no scientist. Don't be foolish. You are. The man who pushes back past where science can go and on

through past where minds can think, into the presence of the Lord of all, and in meek devotion and in holy rapture and awestruck admiration, cries, holy, holy, holy. He's vaster than the philosopher, wider, bigger, grander than the science.

Were you greatly moved by the little satellite that they shot into the air the other night? To tell you the truth I was bored and I'm bored now. They shot it into the air 350 miles up and it's going at 17,000 miles an hour, giving of a beep, beep, beep. Poor little thing. But everybody got excited and said, oh, what have we done?

I remember when an old man came down from the hills of Tishbe, dressed in camel's hair and girded about the loin with a golden girdle. He had never, not a golden, leather girdle. He had never seen a king, and the palace was unknown to him. The pine trees had been his temple. The sound of the wind had been his work. And the stars at night had spoken to him and whispered of the Lord God of his fathers. And he knew the Word. But, he walked boldly into the presence of a degenerate, decadent king and said, I am Elijah. I stand before God. He was bored with royal, red tape. Bored with scepters and crowns and cheap little barber chairs set up and called thrones. He was bored and said, I've spent my years standing in the presence of the Ancient of Days and I'm not afraid of kings. I've come with a message, there will be no rain. Then he disappeared, walking in rustic dignity out of the presence of that puppet king, hen-pecked mouse that he was. A cheap utensil used by a Baal-likish woman by the name of Jezebel.

So when the whole world exploded, oh, they've sent up a satellite. Well, they're good at satellites, they've gotta love it. And I'm bored with it. I've stood in the presence of Him Who encompasses the universe and holds it in His hands. He calls the stars by name and leadeth them forth as a shepherd leads forth his sheep across the green blue heavens above. Am I therefore going to fall down and worship and say how wonderful? I worship the Lord of the sun and the stars and of all space and all time and of all matter and all motion. Therefore, I am not too excited.

He is the Lord of all beings, not of the philosophers, not of the wise man, but the revealed God, the God who reveals Himself, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And since He is the God of all being, He is the enemy of all not being. Therefore, when some fellow with a highly illustrated book, rushes up your sidewalk and wants to play you a little disk, shut the door, shut it kindly like a Christian but shut it. For he wants to talk to you about annihilation. There's no such concept in the whole Bible as annihilation. The Lord of all Being is the enemy of all not being. God knows nothing of not be; He only knows be.

The second and last, He is the Lord of Life. Turn to John, That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, and which we with our eyes have you seen which we looked upon and our hands have handled the Word of Life. For the Life was manifested and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that Eternal Life which was with the Father. And was manifested unto us, that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

So there He is the Lord of all life. He is the Lord of all says Peter. He is thy Lord, worship thou Him, said David. His is of Light, the sole Fountain. There isn't any other Light. He is the fountain of that Light. It's all the light we know comes from the sun, that is all we know I suppose, the stars give off light and all that, but we're thinking as plain people now looking up at the sun. It comes from the sun, and so all light comes from God, from Jesus Christ, the Son.

And when the man of God said, Thou of life the Fountain art, freely let me take of thee, he was like Elijah in the mountains of Tishbe. He had gone past Shakespeare and past Homer. He'd gone past all the philosophers and the wise, and was worshipping in the presence of the Lord of Life. Thou of life the fountain art, freely let me take of thee; spring thou up within my heart, rise to all eternity.

You can go into the average library; I say this with great care. You can go into the average library and you will not find an whole shelf, whole shelves as big as the side of the wall of this church. Almost anywhere you want to go on the writings of man. You'll not find anything as magnificent as those four lines, Thou of life the fountain art, freely let me take of thee, spring Thou up within my heart, and rise to all eternity. For the books stop when the undertaker comes. The books and the plays and all the celebrities, it all stops when the undertaker come. This man says spring thou up within my heart, rise to all eternity. And when the stars have faded out and all the suns have burnt themselves away, we'll still be with Him. For He is the Lord life. He is the Lord of the essence of life. He is the Lord of all the possibility of life. He is the Lord of all kinds of life. And there is no life of which He is not found. Since He is the Lord of life, He is the enemy of death.

And let me read again. Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits afterwards, they that are Christ's that is coming. Then cometh the end when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father. All He shall put down all rule and all authority and power, for He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet. And the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

Since He is the Lord of life, He is the enemy of death. And He came down and went into this cave where death snarled and snapped its jaws. He went in there with it, in the darkness. They called it a cross on a hill, but it was a cave where the snarling dragon lay and broke its filthy jaw, and rose again the third day from the dead, and threw teeth in all directions never to be gathered again together.

And He is the enemy of death. The enemy of my death and the enemy of yours. He is the Lord of life. What does that mean to us? I ran into this written by an old German man many years ago. Jesus lives and so shall I, death by sting is gone forever. He who deign for me to die, lived the band to settle. He shall raise me with the just, Jesus is my hope and trust. That's what it means. Jesus lives and death is now but an entrance into glory. Courage then my soul for thou hast a crown of life before thee. Thou shalt find thy hopes were just, Jesus is the Christian's trust. But the old brother was evangelical and evangelistic, and he couldn't closes his hymn without giving the poor sinner outside there a chance to come in. So he said, Jesus lives and God extends grace to each returning sinner. Rebels, He receives as friends and exalts the highest honor. God is true as He is just, Jesus is my hope and trust. Jesus lives and God extends, grace to each returning sinner, and rebels He receives as friends and exalts the highest honor.

That's what it's all about my brethren. I wish the world could hear it. I wish the world could hear it. I'd like to tell it to the whole world. I'd like to write it into books. I'd like to have it circulated. I like these ideas to get hold of the minds of men until a new day would dawn in evangelical circles. But I don't know. I remember that Keats said, when I have fears that I may cease to be before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain. And he did. Teeming brain into which he dipped his pen and wrote his imperishable poems. This same Pascal of whom I have, from whom I've quoted tonight, Fire fire, joy, joy, tears of joy, he said. And he said, I'm going to write. I'm going to write so that the world will get it. He took notes madly, but he died before he got to print. So, all we've got is his notes.

I would like to be able to write a book or two. I'd like to be able to make my voice heard all over the world, to the poor, poor church living on cheap fiction with the name of Jesus in it. Living on the smiles and bows of converted celebrities. Living to sing cheap songs about once I smoked and now I don't. Once I drank beer, now I don't. Thank God you don't brother. It's cheaper not to and healthier. But, if that's your concept of Christianity, you haven't even seen the door of the outer chambers, let alone the Holy of Holies, or the Sanctum Sanctorum. Let's push all in. Let's move on and let's tell the world why He died and why He lived. That a people once made to worship Him, who had lost their harp and lost their tongue and lost their desire even to worship; now caught and renewed and quickened and made live and enabled to worship again. And it works my brethren, it works.

In 1935 I think it was, I recall, Jaffrey moved down from Indo-China to the country they call Borneo, now called Kalimantan. There he found headhunters. Men with poisoned little arrows which they shot through long blowguns. You can see one of them downstairs in the missionary room. And they hunt those heads, shrink them and hang them up. And He went in there and prayed through, and almost died one night, and praying through, God began to work. Headhunters began to get converted. Older men everywhere all over that era began to get converted. They built their chapels with joy. They threw their idols away and then with joy, they gathered up the shrunken heads they had themselves taken, threw them into the boiling river and they were carried away out into the sea. And they built their chapels. Now in their language they talk about Jesu, Jesus Christ the Son of God. It works my brethren. It works. It works. Of course, He saved them from headhunting, and that's what He saved them from. What did He save them to? To kneel in a simple bamboo chapel and worship the Lord God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and Jesus Christ his only son. That's what He saved them too, and that's all that matters.

Jesus lives and offers to returning sinners a place in His heart. He might restring your harp and give you back your organ again. The organ that can play the anthems and join with the hosts of others. Dear God, how far the church has wandered and how far from being the kind of Christians we ought to be. Put away fleshly things. Put away worldly things. Put away the cheap twaddle of fallen Adam's brood and turn your eyes upon Jesus, the Lamb of God. Your mind will be cleansed and your heart will be cleansed and trust the Holy Spirit to fill you with a spirit of worship again that you may join the angels and the redeemed, and prophets and saints and martyrs singing the songs of the Father who loved you and the Son who loved you, and the Holy Ghost who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-tozer/worship-series-4-a-definition-of-worship/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**