

# The Worship Service: A Hindrance or a Highway for Revival

by Ron Owens

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*True worship, focused on God and led by the Holy Spirit, is essential for revival and acceptable to God.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 144:4, Romans 1:21, Romans 8:20, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 4:18

**Topics:** "Renewed Mind", "True Worship"

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## Description

The preacher delves into the concept of futility, describing it as emptiness, vanity, and purposelessness, particularly in the context of rejecting the truth about God. The futility of the mind is highlighted as a consequence of turning away from God's revelation, leading to a life devoid of true purpose and satisfaction. The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a renewed mind, focused on Christ, to avoid being trapped in fruitless pursuits and empty illusions.

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## Transcript

The uniting of God's people in corporate worship is of crucial importance to the life of the church. What takes place during this time should prepare the way for God to visit His people in revival. It is possible, however, for what occurs in the "worship service" of the church to actually be a hindrance to revival. How can this be true? Let's look at some of the ways revival may be hindered by what we do, or don't do, in our services.

A Misunderstanding of What It Means To Worship.

The word "worship" has numerous connotations in today's churches. This in itself has resulted in many of the problems we face. In order to truly worship God as He desires to be worshiped, we must understand what worship is from His perspective. We must allow His Word to give us a true definition of worship.

The primary word used in the Old Testament for worship is the Hebrew word shachah. In each of its 170 uses, it has the same meaning: to prostrate oneself, to bow down or stoop. In the New Testament, the Greek word for worship, proskuneo, has virtually the same meaning: to crouch, prostrate oneself, to kiss the hand, do reverence, to adore. True worship, therefore, must begin with a heart attitude of bowing or prostrating oneself in adoration and reverence before the One Who is being worshiped. In many instances there may be a physical expression of worship as well.

"And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground" (Neh. 8:6b).

"And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever." (Rev. 5:14b)

Today, we see very little of this attitude of stooping, of humbling oneself in worship. Instead, it seems the church is spending an inordinate amount of time standing and celebrating. Although both worship and celebration should be part of the life of the church, there is a significant difference between the two. In worship, there is a sense of awe and reverence for who God is. He is the focus of worship. In celebration, we rejoice and enjoy what God does, or has done. In actuality, the truest celebration springs from a worshipping heart. There is obviously a place for celebration in the life of the church, but it ought never to replace worshipping God!

In today's church climate, with its focus on celebration rather than worship, an unbeliever or backsliding Christian can actually feel "at home" and enjoy himself in many of our services. In true worship, however, when the focus is on God, a sinner will not feel "at home." In God's presence, sin is revealed. A sinner will be faced with his sin and his need to bow before a holy God in repentance.

There is no record of revival beginning among a people who were always celebrating, but never worshipping. The record, however, is full of those times God came in revival blessing while His children were on their faces before Him. God's requirements have not changed: "if My people . . . will humble themselves" (2 Chron. 7:14).

Seeing Worship As A Means to An End, Rather Than An End in Itself.

Our drive to evangelize and our desire to grow numerically have led us to "use" worship as a tool to reach the lost. We have gone so far as to turn our worship services, as opposed to evangelistic services, into "seeker-friendly" meetings, so the world will feel at home when they come into the house of God. We should always be sensitive to the unsaved, but nowhere in Scripture are we told to accommodate the world in what God calls the believer to offer to Him.

Worship, as we find it in Scripture, is the exclusive right, privilege, and responsibility of the child of God. It is spiritually impossible for an unbeliever to worship. The prevailing idea that the church needs to sound like the world in order to win the world demonstrates a serious misunderstanding of what church really is. It demonstrates more concern with what the world thinks than with what God thinks.

There is one fundamental reason why the living God wants His people to assemble in worship: that is, to ascribe to Him the worth and value that are His, individually and as a body, and to present their bodies as living sacrifices. Worshiping God is not a means to an end; it is an end in itself!

Missing Ingredients in Worship.

In some churches, the vital elements of worship are being omitted from the service because so much time is being taken for other things. What are these "vital elements" of worship? One of them is prayer. Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Mark 11:17), yet prayer is not central in so many of our modern day services.

In our travels, I have sometimes checked the amount of time churches actually spend praying in their worship services. At one point, four out of five spent more time welcoming the visitors than all their praying combined. Two out of those five spent more time making the announcements than in prayer. Recently, in

one of the largest churches in our land, a total of forty-five seconds was actually spent in prayer, while ten minutes were given to a humorous Sunday School promotion.

Another vital element of worship missing from our services is the reading of Scripture. How often have you heard an entire chapter of God's Word read in a worship service? The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to give attention to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim. 4:13). We, too, need to heed this instruction.

When Man Sees the Pulpit as "His" Stage.

We live in a society that craves entertainment. Sadly, this desire to be entertained has gained more than a foothold in the church. By design, many of our church buildings have become theaters. What was once called the "pulpit area" has now become known as the "stage" for "religious performing." This is true both in preaching and in music.

There is no place in a worship service for entertainment. The people are not in need of seeing how clever man is, but how holy God is. They need an encounter with Him. Yet so often a congregation leaves more impressed with the singer than with the Savior; more impressed with the personality of the preacher than with the power of the Holy Spirit. In entertainment the focus is on man, while in worship the focus is always on God. Today it seems that, especially in the world of "Christian music," God is often being used to display man's talent, rather than man's talent being used to display God. We must strive with all our being to keep the congregation's focus where it needs to be. God, after all, is our "audience" in worship. It is His approval that we are to seek. We must continually remind ourselves of this:

It matters not if the world has heard, or approves, or understands;

The only applause we're meant to seek is the applause of nail-scarred hands.

Insensitivity to What the Holy Spirit is Doing in a Service.

It is extremely important that those of us involved in worship leadership remain open and sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit when we are leading the church in worship. The pushing of our own agenda can quickly hinder what God is doing at a particular moment in a service. Let's look at some specific examples involving different areas of leadership.

Imagine a point in a service when something has taken place that has unquestionably led the congregation to a serious evaluation of their lives in light of God's holiness. The people's hearts have been deeply moved. The choir is scheduled to sing next, but they have planned to sing a rhythmic, upbeat version of "Blessed Assurance." There is nothing wrong with the song, but the timing is not right. Music Director, what do you do? Do you just go ahead and do what you have planned, or do you adjust and have the congregation sing a hymn or chorus that is in the flow of what is happening? How often I have seen the Spirit of God quenched by the wrong music. A soloist or choir may be scheduled to sing, but if what is planned would turn the people's focus away from what God is doing, it would be better not to do anything. There are times when the best thing that could happen is silence.

Organists, pianists, and musicians must also be sensitive to what is going on in a service. If, for instance, the service has closed with a deep sense of conviction, they must be careful what they play for a postlude. The focus can so quickly be turned away from God and what He has been doing, and turned toward themselves and their music by playing some boisterous number. Sometimes it may be best to just continue quietly playing the commitment hymn.

Many times I've seen the Holy Spirit grieved by a pastor who, after God has spoken deeply through special music or in the corporate worship of the congregation, gets up and tells a funny story in order to "get his audience." What has really happened is that the pastor has drawn the focus away from God and toward himself. Worship has been hindered.

We must remember that those who are part of the worship leadership will either help or hinder what God wants to accomplish in the service. We must be careful not to quench or grieve the Holy Spirit by being "out of the Spirit."

Substituting "Adrenalin Highs" for the Holy Spirit.

Many in the Christian world seem unaware of the powerful effect music can have on the emotions. The secular world and the New-Age community are well aware of the adrenalin rush that can be produced by the continuous repetition of words and musical phrases.

In his book, *Adrenalin and Stress*, Dr. Archibald Hart points out that adrenalin addiction is just as real as an addiction to drugs. He shows how this happens within the context of some worship styles. In many of our churches today we have mistaken "adrenalin highs" produced by constant musical repetition for the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In our day, when so much emphasis is placed on "having an experience," people are open to deception. The "feeling" one may get from the constant mantra-like repetition of choruses is not the Holy Spirit. When it becomes necessary for people to get a certain "feeling" when they worship, they may very well have become addicted to what the music does to them. The tragedy is that in such situations, the Lord's "manifest presence" has departed, yet no one realizes it. That is exactly what was happening in Jeremiah two, when not even the leaders were asking, "where is the Lord?"

Offering what is Unacceptable to God.

The presenting of offerings which are unacceptable to God is, and always has been, the fundamental hindrance to God's blessing of His people. Numerous Scriptures record God's dealing with His children because they were offering Him worship He could not accept.

One example of this is in the book of Isaiah. In chapter one, we find Israel going through the motions of worship. Even though the people had all the outward appearances of "doing it right," God turned His back on their sacrifices and prayers because their hearts were not His. The words He spoke to them should make us pause and think: "Bring no more futile sacrifices . . . When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear . . . Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean" (vs. 13-16).

It is not the outward excellence of the offering God looks for; it is the excellence of the heart. The sight and the sound of our offerings make no impression on heaven unless they are being lifted up with holy hands. No matter how beautiful they may be, the voices of unregenerate or backsliding church members are unacceptable to God.

Yet our loving God still says to us, "Come now, let us reason together . . . Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). His words still call out to us as His people: "Return to Me, and I will return to You" (Mal. 3:7).

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said that the most important and highest activity any company of God's people could ever engage in was to offer Almighty God acceptable worship. Jesus said that the Father was looking for a people who would worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Such a people prepare the way for revival.

Lord, may our worship services be a highway for Your presence, and not a hindrance.

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