

REPS
DAY SIX
TRUE
WORSHIP

READ

ISAIAH 58:3-9

JOHN 4:19-26

JAMES 1:22-27

REFLECT

In light of God's abundant love and lavish grace, it can feel easy and natural to give God the praise that he is due. After all, God sent Jesus to chase after and die for us when we were undeserving sinners – it makes sense that we would feel compelled to offer worship out of a place of awe and gratitude. But not all worship resonates the same with God. Worship is more than singing praise songs and hymns. It's also more than daily scripture reading and regular fasting. It's even more than just thanking God for the good things he has done for us. Because God wants us to commit our whole lives to him, worship is necessarily a whole life activity in which all our desires, thoughts, and actions are oriented to God's own desires, thoughts, and actions. Usually, orienting our lives in this way comes at a cost, but we are often more willing to pay some costs more than others.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah warns against this selective form of faith by critiquing Israel's worship practices. The Israelites were practicing all the right rituals, making the right sacrifices, and saying the right words, but they neglected the poor and the hungry, exploited their workers, and settled their issues through quarrels and violence. Speaking with God's voice, Isaiah goes as far as to say that Israel's worship has fallen on deaf ears – the Lord will not respond to an unjust people's cry. Centuries later, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman whose people have been marginalized by the Jews. In describing worship to her, he breaks down the barriers of ethnicity and tradition which had led to debates about where worship could occur, saying instead that true worship occurs not in a place, but "in spirit and truth." The book of James also makes a claim about religious worship, boiling it down to its purest form: "to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

So many of the details of what we think of as "worship" are in fact cultural preferences more than anything else. The type of music we sing, the design of the buildings we occupy, the language and tone of the prayers we say – all these are formed by our history and culture rather than by a specific prescription from God. What we do get are prescriptions for how we are to think and live as those transformed by God's grace. The apostle Paul calls this our "spiritual act of worship." (Romans 12:1-2) These prescriptions include guidance for individual morality for sure, but God often reserves the strongest language for commands to enact justice and mercy. Such worship may come at the price of our own power and privilege, but that's exactly what Jesus did for us in extending justice and mercy through the cross. Does our worship reflect that?

RESPOND

Instead of seeing worship as some kind of performance before God, try thinking of it as a daily full body and mind routine. What might it look like if you worshipped like it was a practice rather than a game day? For one thing, it leaves room for grace. There will be days where your worship may be self-serving or empty instead of true. But it also means that you are conscious of the fact that you have room to learn and grow. To worship God in spirit and truth, we must have a right view of who God is and what he cares about.

- How do you see God? Identify and list the characteristics or attributes given to God in the passages you just read.
- Do you love God for who he is, or merely for what he's done? What are some more ways you can continue to become familiar with God's character?