

GOSPEL SHAPED
WORSHIP

Handbook





GOSPEL SHAPED
WORSHIP

Jared C. Wilson



the **goodbook**
COMPANY

TGC THE GOSPEL
COALITION

Gospel Shaped Worship Handbook

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CONTENTS

SERIES PREFACE	7
INTRODUCTION	9
HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED WORSHIP	11
SESSIONS	
SESSION 1: WHAT IS WORSHIP?	13
SESSION 2: THE FOUNDATION OF WORSHIP	33
SESSION 3: WORSHIP AND GOD'S WORD	53
SESSION 4: THE WORSHIP SERVICE	73
SESSION 5: WHY AND HOW WE PRAY	93
SESSION 6: DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF GRACE	113
SESSION 7: BEING CHURCH	133



PREFACE

GROWING A GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH

The Gospel Coalition is a group of pastors and churches in the Reformed heritage who delight in the truth and power of the gospel, and who want the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected to lie at the center of all we cherish, preach and teach.

We want churches called into existence by the gospel to be shaped by the gospel in their everyday life.

Through our fellowship, conferences, and online and printed media, we have sought to encourage pastors and church leaders to calibrate their lives around what is of first importance—the gospel of Christ. In these resources, we want to provide those same pastors with the tools to excite and equip church members with this mindset.

In our foundation documents, we identified five areas that should mark the lives of believers in a local fellowship:

- 1.** Empowered corporate worship
- 2.** Evangelistic effectiveness
- 3.** Counter-cultural community
- 4.** The integration of faith and work
- 5.** The doing of justice and mercy

We believe that a church utterly committed to winsome and theologically substantial expository preaching, and that lives out the gospel in these areas, will display its commitment to dynamic evangelism, apologetics, and church planting. These gospel-shaped churches will emphasize repentance, personal renewal, holiness, and the wonderful life of the church as the body of Christ. At the same time, there will be engagement with the social structures of ordinary people, and cultural engagement with art, business, scholarship and government. The church will be characterized by firm devotion to the truth on the one hand, and by transparent compassion on the other.

The Gospel Coalition believes in the priority of the local church, and that the local church is the best place to discuss these five ministry drivers and decide how to integrate them into life and mission. So, while being clear on the biblical principles, these resources give space to consider what a genuine expression of a gospel-shaped church looks like for you in the place where God has put you, and with the people he has gathered into fellowship with you.

Through formal teaching sessions, daily Bible devotionals, group Bible studies and the regular preaching ministry, it is our hope and prayer that congregations will grow into maturity, and so honor and glorify our great God and Savior.



Don Carson
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Carson".

Tim Keller
Vice President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy J. Keller".



INTRODUCTION

I think you could make a pretty good case that evangelicals don't really know what worship is—or, at least, they don't really know what worship *fully* is.

Scroll through your social media feeds on a typical Sunday morning and you will see lots of talk among your churchgoing friends about worship—but I'd be willing to bet that most of that talk is focused entirely on *music*.

But worship is more than a genre of music or one section of a worship service. Even to speak of worship largely in terms of a worship service is not to do the subject justice. We tend to talk in compartmentalized ways about something that by its very nature cannot be compartmentalized; because, according to the Bible, worship is *every human being's way of life*. We are never not worshipping. We just can't help it.

At each and every moment of our lives, we are living in a way that “gives worth” to something. For many people, their ideas of worth are centered on themselves, or their family or their job. In one way or another we are worshipping ourselves. But for those who have discovered the grace of God in Jesus Christ, a massive change has taken place. By the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are enabled to start worshipping the one true God instead of the many false gods we fill our lives with.

What is true for us as individuals is true for us as a gathered community of God's people. We discover in the Bible that a church that is centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ will be shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. And a church shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ will see that its true “service of worship” is conducted both inside the formal gathering of believers and outside it as well.

We worship when we sing, yes, but we also worship when we preach and receive preaching, when we pray, when we share the gospel, and when we love our neighbors in a million different ways throughout the week.

The Gospel Coalition has included this statement in their Theological Vision for Ministry, entitled "Empowered corporate worship":

The gospel changes our relationship with God from one of hostility or slavish compliance to one of intimacy and joy. The core dynamic of gospel-centered ministry is therefore worship and fervent prayer.

In corporate worship God's people receive a special life-transforming sight of the worth and beauty of God, and then give back to God suitable expressions of his worth. At the heart of corporate worship is the ministry of the Word.

In each session, our aim is to refresh our sense of God's love for us in Christ, so that every aspect of our community life would be shaped by the gospel and lead us to glorify the God who supplies his grace so abundantly in Jesus.

And as you work through this program as a church together, my hope is that you will capture a vision of worship that goes way beyond a song or a service on Sunday morning. I pray that you will discover an enlarged and empowered vision for your life as a worshiper, as we look again and again into Christ's glory in the gospel found in his word.



Jared C. Wilson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jared C. Wilson".



HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED WORSHIP



MAIN TEACHING SESSION This session combines watching short talks on a DVD or listening to “live” talks with times for discussion. These prompt you to think about what you have heard and how it might apply to your church and cultural context. Bear in mind that there is not necessarily a “right answer” to every question!



DEVOTIONALS Each session comes with six daily personal devotionals. These look at passages that are linked to the theme of the Main Teaching Session, and are for you to read and meditate on at home through the week after the session. You may like to do them in addition to or instead of your usual daily devotionals, or use them to begin such a practice.



JOURNAL As you reflect on what you have learned as a group and in your personal devotionals, use this page to record the main truths that have struck you, things you need to pray about, and issues you’d like to discuss further or questions you’d like to ask.



BIBLE STUDY As part of this curriculum, your church may be running weekly Bible Studies as well as the Main Teaching Sessions. These look more closely at a passage and help you focus on an aspect of the Main Teaching Session. If your church is not using this part of the curriculum, you could work through it on your own or with another church member.



SERMON NOTES Your church’s preaching program may be following this curriculum; space has been provided for you to make notes on these sermons in your Handbook.



SESSION 1:

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

"WORSHIP" IS ONE OF THE WORDS MOST COMMONLY USED IN CHURCHES AND BY CHRISTIANS. BUT WHAT DOES IT ACTUALLY MEAN? WHAT IS IT, AND WHEN DO WE DO IT? THESE ARE THE QUESTIONS WE CONSIDER IN THIS FIRST SESSION; AND, AS WE'LL SEE, THE ANSWERS ARE EXCITING AND ALL-ENCOMPASSING.



WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Discuss

What comes into your mind when you hear the word “worship”?

WATCH DVD 1.1 OR LISTEN TO TALK 1.1

Discuss

“Worship means to give worth or value to something. It expresses what we find most valuable or satisfying.” How is this a wider definition of worship than we often use?

 **MARK 12:28-31**

28 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

God is of far greater worth than anyone or anything else. How do we show that we understand this, according to Jesus?

Would you consider Jesus' answer a description of worship? Why or why not?

In the DVD, Jared asked the following questions:

- *What animates you most, energizes you most, captivates you most, stirs and inspires and motivates you most?*
- *What, based on your daily life and behavior, would people say is the most important thing to you?*

How would someone who knew you well answer these questions?

How might an outside observer answer them about your church, based on:
a) your Sunday services? b) seeing what you are like outside of formal services?

 **WATCH DVD 1.2 OR LISTEN TO TALK 1.2**

Discuss

What might be some examples of socially acceptable idolatry within evangelical churches?

Why is this kind of idolatry more difficult for us to see?

 **LUKE 6:45**

[Jesus said:] *“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”*

“Jesus is saying that acceptable worship comes from an acceptable heart.” Why is this both a liberating and a challenging truth for us?

Summary

How would you now define the word “worship”?

Do you find yourself or your church using the word “worship” in an unhelpfully restrictive way? What consequences does/might this have?

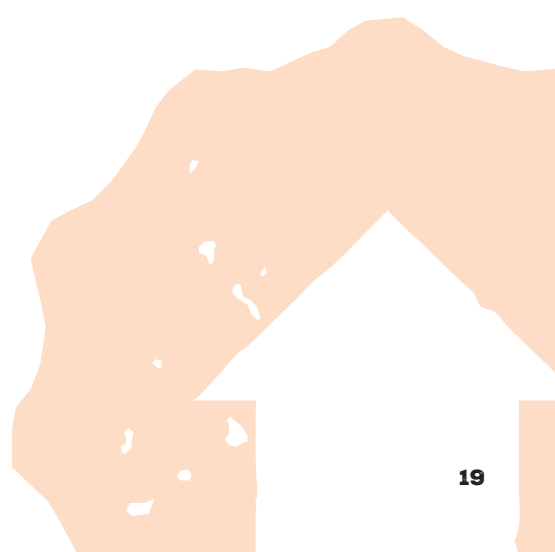
"Let's start using the word 'worship' in the right way. Not just about gathering and singing together, but about knowing and sharing the love of God in our lives at every moment of every day."

Think of two ways in which you will "worship God" differently this week. Ask the rest of your group to pray for you as you do this.

Pray

Pray that as you all work through this curriculum, you will grow in your understanding of who God is and all he has done for you, and that you will reflect this as a church family.

Pray that you will have acceptable hearts that lead you to worship God. Pray that your love for God will also produce love for your neighbors.





DAILY BIBLE DEVOTIONALS

This week we'll look at Romans 12:1-8, as the apostle Paul shows us what true, acceptable worship is, and why and how we are to be this kind of worshiper.

Day 1

ROMANS 12:1

Q: *If we present ourselves as sacrifices, what are we doing (end of verse)?*

Q: *To what (or "by" what) does Paul appeal to motivate us to live like this?*

"Therefore" means Paul is saying: *In light of all I have shown you of the mercies of God in chapters 1 – 11, respond this way...*

Q: *Read Romans 3:23-25a; 5:1-2; 8:1, 26-29; 9:15-16. What "mercies of God" are outlined in chs 1 – 11?*

"By" has the sense of "on the basis of." The NIV helpfully renders it "in view of" God's mercies. Our obedience to God flows out of our gratitude to him. We obey not because we have to, as slaves (*If I don't obey God, he won't love me!*), but because we want to, as sons (*God loves me; I can please him by obeying him!*). We will only joyfully worship God if we keep our eyes fixed on his mercies to us.

PRAY: *Lord, you have chosen and saved me, so you will never condemn me. You hear, help and change me. Thank you for all your mercies.*

Day 2

ROMANS 12:1

We worship God in view of his mercies...

Q: *What do we "present" in worship?*

This is temple imagery. Old Testament worshipers made sin offerings—fulfilled in Jesus' sin-bearing death—and whole burnt offerings—which Paul has in mind here. This was a valuable, defect-free animal from your flock; it was a way of showing that all you had was at God's disposal—you were not giving God your leftovers!

Our offering is ourselves—all of us, the best of us. We are to sacrifice our interests and comforts daily. This means to be willing to obey God in every area of life, and to thank God for everything he sends in life. Just as our sin shows itself through how we use our bodies (3:13-19), so our salvation is to show itself through how we use our bodies. Worship is about all we do, all the time.

Q: *How does this definition of "worship" excite you? And challenge you?*

PRAY: *Lord of mercies, help me to give you all of myself, all the time. Show me how to worship you in every way today.*

Day 3

ROMANS 12:1

There can be few verses of Scripture more packed, and more powerful, than this one!

Q: *What is God's verdict on a life offered to him, in response to his mercies?*

"Acceptable" can also be translated as "pleasing." How wonderful to know that, through simple, sacrificial obedience, our lives can be acceptable and pleasing to our Creator and Redeemer!

Q: *When do you find obeying hardest? How does this truth motivate you to obey sacrificially in that area?*

"Spiritual" translates *logican*—"logical" or "rational" (see ESV footnote). To present our bodies as living sacrifices is the only logical way to respond to God's mercies. If we have a good view of his mercies, it will seem nonsense to worship God half-heartedly. This is what real, *logican* worship is: we focus on God's mercies to us in giving us the best he has, at unimaginable cost; and we respond by giving him the best we have, whatever the cost.

Q: *How is this view of worship more exciting, and more difficult, than seeing it as "going to church" or "singing praise"?*

PRAY: *Lord of mercies, thank you that I can please you by obeying you. Please remind me of this when obeying is hard.*

Day 4

ROMANS 12:2

Q: *What should we not allow to happen?*

Q: *What should we seek to be instead?*

Q: *As this happens, what will we be able to do? Why will this enable worship?*

The Christian life is inside out, not outside in. As a balloon is inflated by blowing air into the inside of it, which then changes its shape externally, so the gospel needs to transform our minds internally, which will then change our behavior externally. And as a balloon full of air resists the pressure around it to squeeze it, so a gospel-minded Christian can resist the world's constant efforts to squeeze them into its mold.

Therefore true worship is about who you are, and whose you are, before it is ever about what you do and do not do. A heart truly changed by the gospel produces a life truly formed by the gospel. And such heart-change comes from looking at, enjoying and valuing all of God's mercies to us—past, present and future.

Q: *In which areas of your life is there a conflict between conformity to the world and what your gospel-directed mind knows is God's will? This is an opportunity to offer yourself as a worshiping sacrifice!*

PRAY: *Lord of mercies, permeate my mind with the gospel more and more.*

Day 5**ROMANS 12:3**

Q: *How are we not to think of ourselves?
How are we to look at ourselves?*

“Sober” means to be rigorously in touch with reality. The modern world says our problem is low self-esteem; other religions tend to see our problem as high self-esteem; Paul preaches gospel-esteem. We need to see ourselves “according to the measure of faith God has assigned.” Paul is saying: *You have been given saving faith in Christ crucified; this is what you are to measure yourself against.*

Q: *Read 3:9-20. How does the gospel stop us thinking too highly of ourselves?*

Q: *Read 8:14-18. How does it stop us thinking too lowly of ourselves?*

To think too highly or lowly of ourselves is to think too much about ourselves, and too little about the gospel. We are *sinners*: but we are also *saved sinners*. We can accept we cannot do everything ourselves, so we are open to relying on others. And we can acknowledge what we are able to do well, so we are able to serve others. Gospel-esteem enables and prompts our worship.

Q: *Do you tend to think of yourself too highly, or too lowly? How does this affect your Christian life and worship?*

PRAY: *Lord, give me grace to view myself in the light of the gospel.*

Day 6**ROMANS 12:4-8**

Paul has taught us to see ourselves in terms of the gospel. Next he teaches us to see ourselves in terms of church. Notice he presupposes that a worshiping Christian will be part of a worshiping community.

Q: *What image is used for church (v 4-5)?*

Q: *How are believers tied together (v 5)?*

Q: *What do we all have (v 6)? What should we do with them?*

We are all equally sinners, and equally saved; but we are different in character and gifting.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-25. Seeing ourselves as members of a body, our church, prevents us from thinking either too much or too little of ourselves. You are one member of a body; you need the rest of your church. You are a member of that body; the rest of your church needs you. Seeing ourselves this way shows us that we must, and can, use our gifts in a way that sacrificially worships God, by placing them at the disposal, and for the good, of the rest of our church.

Q: *Do you need to change your view of your place in church at all? Do you need to use your gifts (abilities, time, money, etc.) differently?*

PRAY: *Lord, help me to view your mercies well, see myself rightly, and worship you by serving your people.*

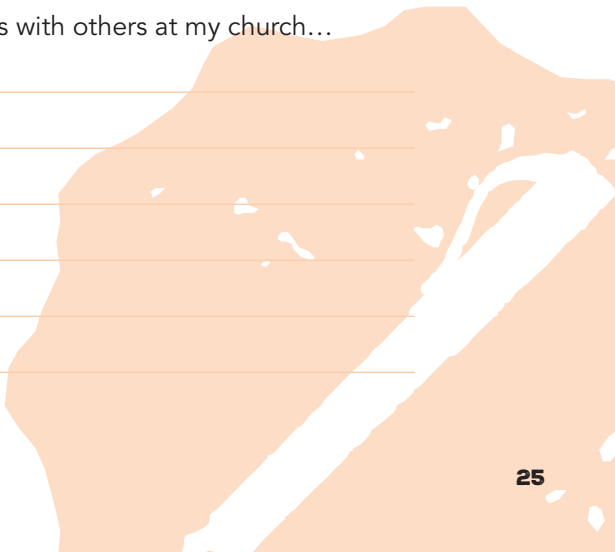


JOURNAL

What I've learned or been particularly struck by this week...

What I want to change in my perspectives or actions as a result of this week...

Things I would like to think about more or discuss with others at my church...





BIBLE STUDY

Discuss

If you had a fire in your house, what three things would you pick up as you ran out of the building? What makes them so valuable to you?

Jared said on the DVD: "We worship what we most value." Psalm 16 gives us a window into the heart and mind of David as he thinks and sings about his love for God and devotion to him. It will help us see what true worship looks like for a follower of Christ.



READ PSALM 16

¹ *Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.*

² *I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."*

1. What do verses 1-2 show us about David's relationship with God? What delights and excites him about the LORD?

2. "I have no good thing apart from you" (v 2). What does this phrase tell us about how David sees his life and the world around him?

How will this perspective help us when we are tempted to envy what the world has and enjoys?

3. List the blessings that God pours out on him in v 5-11. How does this help us see how valuable our relationship with God is?

4. How does the love of God toward David stir his affections (v 3, 9, 11)?

5. Verse 10 is quoted in the New Testament as being a prophetic reference to the resurrection of Christ (see Acts 2:25-28; 13:35). How does knowing the meaning of this verse give us greater appreciation of the surpassing value of God?

6. Like us, David lives in a culture that worships other gods. What does he understand about these alternative objects of worship (v 4)?

How would the truths elsewhere in the psalm help David to avoid worshipping idols instead of the one true God?

Apply

FOR YOURSELF: Which part of this description of David's spiritual life seems furthest away from your own experience? Reflect on why this might be, and how you could grow in true worship with your heart, mind, soul and strength.

FOR YOUR CHURCH: How can you encourage genuine heartfelt worship in your own church? What would that look like in your conversations, singing and how you spend your time together?

Pray

FOR YOUR GROUP: Pray that you would encourage and teach each other to remember the goodness of God. Pray that you would be devoted to the Lord and supportive of each other. Give thanks for the aspects of God's blessing to you that you have particularly appreciated as you have studied this psalm.

FOR YOUR CHURCH: As your church embarks on this series examining what true worship means, pray that you would grow together in appreciating the all-surpassing value of the Lord, and that you would have a growing desire to worship him, please him and honor him.

