

Study Guide for

Essential Worship

As the author states in the introduction, *Essential Worship* is a personal book, a glimpse of his yet-unfinished journey to Essential Worship. To be truly useful, the readers must make it equally personal to themselves. That's what this study guide seeks to do: to guide the reader to adapt the principles presented in the book to their own life.

The study guide is divided into six sections, each divided into three parts: reading, reflection, and planning. Individual study will be self-paced. It is recommended that group study consist of one unit per week, with the reading, reflection, and planning being done before the group session and most of the group time being devoted to discussion. For either individual or group study, the only material required (in addition to the book and study guide) is a notebook for reflection and discussion notes.

Unit 1:

Reading: Pages 1 – 11

(Introduction; and How We Got Here—and Why; Worship, the Bible, and Me.)

Questions for Reflection:

1. Regarding the elderly deacon at the beginning of Chapter 1 (How We Got Here—and Why), have you seen people with similar attitudes in your church? Do you mostly agree or disagree with them? What scriptural references come to mind to support your opinion?
2. What is your definition of authentic worship? What elements must it include?
3. The author says he has been a member and/or attended services in a half-dozen types of churches. In your opinion, would this sort of journey make his concept stronger or weaker, clearer or more confused?
4. What do you think of the author's

analogy between a pet owner and his pets and God and his creation? Is it a valid analogy? Why or why not?

5. There are brief portraits of several types of worshipers in Chapter 2 (Worship, the Bible, and Me). Are any of these types familiar to you? If so, do you think that the attitude displayed by the worshiper is a help or a hindrance in their worship? Why do you think that?

Planning:

Based on your reading and the reflections you have made in this section, describe the elements you think would be most important in improving your worship.

Unit 2:

Reading: Pages 18-33

(What Is Worship; Worship from the Outside)

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you agree with the author's statement that David was worshipping when he was denying himself to pray for the infant and when he quit denying himself? Is one part of that worship more authentic or more pleasing to God than the other?
2. What, if anything, is the significance of there being no worship before Adam and Eve are banished from the garden? How does that affect our concept of the purpose of worship?
3. How helpful do you think prayer books or other written prayers are to your worship?
4. Do you agree that the difference between God's attitude toward the offerings of Cain and Abel was not what they brought but the degree of devotion symbolized by what they brought? If you don't agree, what are God's criteria for accepting one and rejecting the other?
5. What characteristics of "worship from

the outside” are most important?

Planning:

Note at least three things you can do to make your “worship from the outside” more meaningful.

Unit 3:

Reading: Pages 34-55

(Worship from the Inside; Becoming Worship)

Questions for Reflection:

1. The author defines “worship from the inside” as something that wells up within you because of either great joy or great sorrow. Have you experienced that? Was it, in the language of the book, a blues or an aria?
2. Do you believe that there is an imbalance between our spontaneous expressions of joy and of sorrow? If so, which side do you believe that you err on?
3. From the examples in “Worship from the Inside” (the psalmist, Mary, and Simeon), what lessons can you draw?
4. The author contends that the Scriptures, despite the often violent parts of the Old Testament, support a vision of God Who calls us closer to Him. If that is true, how do you reconcile the angry God so often depicted?
5. The story of Stephen is used as an example of essential worship. What in the story, if anything, supports that?

Planning:

Considering your thoughts in the Reflection section, what actions can you take to make your worship from the inside more balanced?

List at least three behaviors you can change that will help you draw closer to God, to move toward essential worship.

Unit 4:

Reading: Pages 56-86

(Baby Steps and Half Measures, Job and Jonah)

Questions for Reflection:

1. The author asserts that we get in our own way in trying to draw closer to God because of two words that sound somewhat alike but have opposite meanings: arrogate (to claim something without justification) and abrogate (to evade a responsibility or duty) How do you feel that arrogation and abrogation affects our efforts to draw closer to God?
2. What lessons can we draw from the story of Jonah?
3. In the story of Job, God declares him a righteous man but allows Satan to take away everything that is of value to Job. Why do you think God did that?
4. The author finds a commonality between the stories of Job and Jonah. Do you agree with his conclusion?
5. How do we sometimes or frequently approach God as Job and Jonah did?

Planning:

Write down the steps we can take to avoid approaching God as Jonah and Job did. What tangible results do you think you will experience.

Unit 5:

Reading: Pages 77-100

(Claiming What Isn't Ours; Too Strong and Too Weak)

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you agree with the quoted pastor that “self-righteousness is the worst disease ever to afflict the human race?” If you do, why do you think that is true? If you don't what do you think its position relative to other human failings may be?
2. Have you observed signs of self-righteousness in your life or in the lives of those you know? What were the consequences?
3. In Jesus' parable of the two men who went to pray, which do you identify most closely with, the religious man

or the tax collector? Does your worship reflect this identification?

4. Do you feel you've been called to a task by God that was beyond your capabilities? If so, how did you respond?
5. Of the heroes mentioned in the chapter Too Strong and Too Weak, which do you think provides the best role model? Why?

Planning:

Assess your own recent actions and determine whether you have acted appropriately in terms of humility and in following God's directions. List some ways you can improve your actions going forward.

Unit 6:

Reading Pages 101-117

(Moving Toward Essential Worship)

Questions for Reflection:

1. Of the four steps addressed in this chapter, which do you believe may be the most difficult for you to do? What actions will you take to accomplish it?
2. What is the personal impact of "know that I am God?" How does it relate to the Biblical figures mentioned earlier in the book?
3. The author amended Stephen Covey's second habit to read "Begin with the right end in mind." Do you think this has any impact on your attitude toward worship?
4. Reread 2 Chronicles 7:14. Which of the three requirements listed in God's instructions to Solomon do you need to work on first? How will you begin?

Your Journey To Essential Worship

The answers that you have written in your notebook based on the Reflection Questions are just a starting point. Dedicate the rest of the notebook to thoughts, plans, and actions concerning your journey, and periodically assess your progress.