As I said, I’ve been looking forward to this message in our series, Discipleship Essentials on worship. There are two primary types of worship – there is private worship and corporate worship.

Private worship is when you are alone with God and corporate worship is when you gather with other believers to worship. Both are encouraged in the Bible and both are valid and important. My primary private worship is in the morning when I do my personal Bible Study.

As many of you know I use a method called SOAP. SOAP is an acrostic for:

S- Scripture – I use the reading guides we publish and distribute every quarter. I read until I sense God speaking to me specifically in a verse or two and then I stop and journal.

O- Observation – After writing down the verse in my journal I begin to make observations about the text: who are the characters, what’s happening, what’s God saying?

A – Application – Now I look at my own life and ways God is speaking to me. What does he want me to learn? Invariably this turns into a time of worship and praise.

P – Prayer - The final step in the method is to write out a prayer to God about what he has taught me. Recently reviewing my journal I found several entries that pertained to worship. The first was entered August 30, 2011. It is titled
1ST THE **FOCUS OF WORSHIP** – it is not about me.

**S- Revelation 4:11**

The verse was Revelation 4:11 that says, “You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created.”

**O - John** was one of the twelve apostles – the first committed followers of Jesus. In fact, he was one of intimate three – Peter, James and John; part of Jesus’ discipleship **quad**.

**Most** of the other disciples have already been martyred for following Jesus. John was **exiled** to the island of **Patmos** by the Romans for his persistent preaching of the Good News about Christ.

While **there** he is shown a vision by God of things happening in heaven and things to come on earth. In chapter **four** he witnesses worship in heaven. He describes what must be the **throne room** of God in amazing detail. Then 24 elders leave their **thrones**, fall down before God and offer their praises to him.

They lay their **crowns** at his feet and acknowledge Him as the One who created everything. Nothing existed until He spoke it into being. He created all the magnificent beauty and order and balance of the universe.

Then he created humankind and waits to see how many of us will turn from ourselves, see and acknowledge Him.

**A - Too** often I look around, see the incredible world and think it is primarily for my pleasure. Like a kid in a candy store, I run through attempting to satiate my every appetite.
I give little thought to one who built the store and filled it with pleasurable delights. But those who are Wise, represented by elders in this verse, recognize it is not primarily about them, but about the One who created it all.

The utterly amazing thing is that if we acknowledge Him and His rightful place, he invites us, as his children to relish, savor and enjoy it with Him.

P – In worship I thank my heavenly Father for the priceless privilege of being His child.

Each day should begin with a time of worship, recognizing our Heavenly Father’s blessing and giving thanks for all he is to us. A 2nd journal entry

2ND THE GUIDELINES FOR WORSHIP

S – “Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song. Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful.” Psalm 149:1

#1 He encourages singing

Singing in worship is an expression of faith. Like baptism, when done in public, it’s a declaration of commitment and it’s also a proclamation of truth.

Singing aloud, we openly declare our love for, and commitment to God. We also proclaim truths about his character and his work in our lives.

Now if you’re not a singer and you’re afraid of offending those around you with the sounds you make, just open your mouth anyway and just mouth the words. Everyone seeing you, including God will know that you are expressing the emotions of your heart.

#2 the psalmist prescribes new songs.
**Songs** are most often descriptions of God’s **character** that the **song writer** has observed or **experienced**. They are **stories** of God’s works among us.

**New** songs are like serving **fresh bread**; not just recounting older past encounters with God, but **sharing** our new experiences with him; things that are fresh every day. That’s why we **SOAP** – we write down new discoveries. We need fresh truths to share and new experiences to recount.

**Joey’s New Song**

**#3 We worship in the assembly of the faithful.**

We all need **encouragement** from each other; we’re designed for relationships; we don’t **survive** alone; we **strengthen** each other. **Sunday** worship has been the **practice** of the church since the **week** after Jesus **died**.

This was a **radical departure** from hundreds of years of Jewish **tradition** – to worship on **Sunday** instead of **Saturday**; to give God the **first** day of the week **instead** of the **last**.

I don’t **care** where you are on **Sunday**, find a **group** of believers to **worship** with. In this **day** of weak commitment, **lethargic** dedication, **pathetic** Christian devotion and character, we need to again put God first on Sunday. And it’s not just an **hour** a **week** that God **commanded**, but a **day** of worship.

**#4 We worship with joy**

(vs 2-3) “**O Israel, rejoice in your Maker...exult in your King.**”

The **psalmist** describes rejoicing, exulting, dancing, accompanied by **instruments** of all kinds. God **delights** in
uninhibited worship when done in sincerity and genuineness. And the Bible says God crowns it with salvation.

Is there something you need to be saved from, delivered from? A habit, a disease, a crisis, a challenge or trial – worship is a path to God’s special blessing – he crowns it with salvation.

Many of us are still struggling with habits, attitudes and actions and we need salvation. The psalmist points out a connection between humble, joyful uninhibited worship and deliverance.

I heard a pastor when he looked out at his congregation on Sunday morning, saw the sour expressions on their faces, was convinced that some must have been baptized in lemon juice.

#5 It’s our weapon of choice

V.6 The praise of God in our mouths is like a sword in our hand. It defeats the enemy and frees the captives (evangelism).

As we gather regularly for worship, prepared with fresh praises, and enthusiastic adoration and love, those who come to observe and witness will be convinced of the reality of the One we serve.

3RD THE WARNING OF WORSHIP

2 Samuel 6:21-22 “I am willing to act like a fool in order to show my joy in the Lord. Yes, I am willing to look even more foolish than this...”

King David danced before the Lord with all his might—uninhibited exuberance. David had been accepted and anointed as king over all Israel. He had captured the fortress of Zion in Jerusalem and made it his capitol.
He had defeated his arch enemies, the Philistines and now he was bringing the Ark of God to his capitol city. He did this with great ceremony and celebration.

He appointed a choir accompanied by lyres and harps and cymbals and trumpets, playing loudly and joyfully.

And David danced wildly to show his joy in the Lord. But looking down from her window on the crowd and celebration Michal, the daughter of Saul, David’s wife, saw David dancing and was filled with contempt for him.

Then when David returned home Michal fired off a caustic volley of contempt, disgust and criticism. For this the Bible says she remained barren and childless throughout her life.

Worship is often a personal expression of joy and thankfulness. And God is more concerned about our hearts than he is our outward appearance. David was a man after God’s own heart and when his heart exploded in exuberant worship, God was far more pleased with David’s enthusiasm than he was with Michal’s disgust and criticism.

My prayer is that my heart be so filled with joy and thanksgiving that it bursts forth in exuberant worship and may I never dare criticize someone else’s worship.

4TH THE BLESSING OF WORSHIP

There is a fascinating research study done by Vicki Medvec, a professor at Northwestern University. She studied Olympic medalists and she discovered that Bronze medalists were happier than Silver medalists. Here’s why.

Medvec found that Silver medalists tended to focus on how close they came to winning gold so they weren’t satisfied with silver.
Bronze medalists tended to focus on how close they came to not winning a medal at all so they were just happy to be on the medal stand at all.

I think that study reveals a fascinating facet of human nature: your focus determines your reality. How we feel isn’t determined by objective circumstances.

If that was the case, Silver Medalists would be happier than Bronze medalists because they had an objectively better result. But how we feel isn’t determined by our objective circumstances. How we feel is determined by our subjective focus; what we’re thinking about our circumstances.

Here’s another way of saying it: your internal attitudes are more important than your external circumstances.

That’s true, isn’t it? All of us know people who can find something good to focus on even in the worst of circumstances. And all of us know people who can find something bad to focus on even in the best of circumstances.

* Consider the worshipper’s pre-decision

We tend to see what we’re looking for. Some say there are two basic types of people in the world: complainers and worshippers. Complainers can always find something to complain about. Worshippers can always find something to praise God about.

All of us develop ideas about things and then we look for evidence to support our assumption, and ignore evidence to the contrary.

For example, if you decide you don’t like someone you’ll notice everything that is wrong with that person. And you’ll probably ignore anything you could potentially like about them.
The **flipside** is true as well. If you’re **head-over-heels** in love with someone you **tend** to only notice those **things** you **appreciate** about them. We **see** what we’re looking for.

**What** does that have to do with **worship**? A true **worshipper** makes a **pre-decision** to look for something to **praise** God about even in the **direst** of circumstances. **Acts 16** is exhibit A. In Acts 16, **Paul and Silas** are in a **prison cell in Philippi**. I’d encourage you to **read** the entire **chapter** yourself, but let me **set** the **scene**. Paul casts a **demon** out of a **fortune-teller**. Her **master** doesn’t like it because she **loses** the ability to **predict** the future so he has Paul and Silas **arrested**.

Acts 16:22 says, “A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn’t escape. So he took no chances but put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.”

I think we **read** a story **like this** and it’s almost **tough** to put ourselves in their **shoes**. I’ve had **bad days** before, but **nothing** like this.

As a **kid**, maybe you read a book titled **Alexander and the Horrible, Terrible, No Good, Very Bad Day**. This is Paul and Silas and the Horrible, Terrible, No Good, Very **Bad Day**.

**If** I’m Paul or Silas I’m **emotionally** and **physically** and **spiritually** spent. I’m **drained** to the last drop. I’ve got **nothing** left to give.

Their **backs** are **bleeding** from their beating. They are **black** and **blue** all over. And they had to be **ticked off**, you’d think. And to **top** it off, they land in the **maximum security** cell in stocks!

It just **doesn’t get** much **worse** than that. And that’s why this
next verse is so amazing to me. Acts 16:25 says, “Around midnight, Paul and Silas were complaining about their circumstances.”

That’s not what it says. It says, “Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.”

Let me share something I saw this week at Lake Tulloch. Ryan Dalby, one of our 24 year old youth leaders had just returned from a run on a wave runner. He opened his backpack to find that his plastic bottle of sun block had exploded all over the contents inside.

He was sitting on the edge of the dock cleaning sun block off everything in the back pack. It was a mess. I came over to offer encouragement. He looked up and said, “I’m at Fryathon – I refuse to let circumstances steal my joy.”

When I get into a spiritual or emotional slump, it’s usually because I’ve zoomed in on a problem. I’m fixating on something that is wrong. I’m focused on the wrong thing.

Nine times out of ten, the solution is zooming out so I can get some perspective. Sometimes you’ve got to zoom out and look at the big picture. That’s what the following college student did in writing this letter:

Dear Mom and Dad,

I have so much to tell you. Because of the fire in my dorm set off by student riots, I experienced temporary lung damage and had to go to the hospital. While I was there, I fell in love with an orderly, and we have moved in together. I dropped out of school when I found out I was pregnant, and he got fired because of
his drinking, so we’re going to move to Alaska, where we might get married after the birth of our baby.

Your loving daughter

PS: None of this REALLY happened,.. but I did flunk my chemistry class and I wanted you to keep it in perspective.

* Consider the worshipper’s perspective

Sometimes you need to zoom out and look at the big picture. You fail a chemistry exam and it may feel like the end of the world. But it’s not.

So how do we zoom out? Let me give it to you in one word: WORSHIP.

Worshipping is taking our eyes off of our external circumstances and focusing on God. We stop focusing on what’s wrong with us or with our circumstances. We start focus on what’s right with God.

Paul and Silas could have zoomed in and complained about their circumstances. “God, we cast out a demon and this is what we get? We’re on a missionary journey and we get beaten and thrown in jail?

Instead of “watching our back” our backs are bleeding from a beating! They could have complained all night. But they made a choice to worship God in spite of their external circumstances.

Here’s what worship does. It restores spiritual equilibrium. It helps you regain your perspective. It enables you to find
something right to praise God about even when everything seems to be going wrong.

Worship is zooming out and refocusing on the big picture. It’s refocusing on the fact that two thousand years ago, Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin. It’s refocusing on the fact that God loves me when I least expect it and least deserve it.

It’s refocusing on the fact that God is going to get me where God wants me to go. It’s refocusing on the fact that I have eternity with God to look forward to in a place where there is no mourning or sorrow or pain. Worship is refocusing on the fundamentals of our faith. And here is what happens: God restores the joy of our salvation. We regain our spiritual balance.

Is it easy? Absolutely not. Nothing is more difficult than praising God when everything seems to be going wrong. But one of the purest forms of worship is praising God even when you don’t feel like it because it shows we’re not just worshipping God for the blessings.

Worship is reframing our circumstances.
* Consider the worshippers response-ability

In the book, Man’s Search for Meaning, Victor Frankl. a Holocaust survivor writes about his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp.

Everything was taken from these prisoners. They separated them from most of their family, stripped of their clothing, pictures, and personal belongings. They even took away their names and gave them numbers. Frankl was number 119,104.

Everything was taken away except one thing. Frankl said, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of
He was convinced that the most **important choice** you make every day is your **attitude**. Your **internal** attitudes are more **important** than all your **external** circumstances. The **outcome** of your **life** will be determined by your **outlook** of your life.

If you have a **critical** or **complaining** spirit you’ll complain till the day you **die**. Your life will get **worse** and worse because you’ll **accumulate** more and more **negative** experiences.

But **if** you have a **worshipful spirit**, life gets **better** and better. Why? Because you **accumulate** positive **memories**. At the **end** of the day, one way or the other, your **focus** determines your **reality**!

A positive **response-ability** is one dimension of the **Imago Dei** or **image** of God. We have **free choice**. We are response-able. In **other** words, we have the **ability** to choose our **response** in **any** set of circumstances.

Paul and Silas were in **prison**. Their bodies were **chained**. But you **can’t chain** the human spirit. That’s what Victor **Frankl** discovered in the **concentration** camp.

That’s what **Paul** and Silas modeled **two thousand** years ago. Their **bodies** were chained, but their spirits **soared**.

This is one of the **audio tracks** I’d love to hear. I wish we had the **MP3** of Paul and Silas **singing**. There is something so **awesome** about worshipping God at the **top** of your voice without caring how it **sounds**.

I **don’t** know Paul and Silas were **in tune**. But I think they sang with a **conviction** that caused their **fellow prisoners** to listen. They **praised** God at the top of their **voices**! And that choice to **worship** set off a **chain reaction**.
Consider the worshipper’s premeditated cognitive commitments

Albert Einstein said, “You can’t solve a problem on the level it was created.”

I think problems created on a human plane are solved on the supernatural plane. That’s what happens when we worship God. It changes the spiritual atmosphere. It charges the spiritual reality.

You can’t plan Pentecost. But if you pray for ten days, Pentecost might just happen. I don’t think Paul could have planned this miraculous jailbreak.

What followed their worship service was an earthquake. The prisoners were set free, but they didn’t leave! The jailer started about to kill himself but gets saved and his entire family is baptized in the middle of the night.

You can’t script that kind of thing. You can’t plan miracles. But when you worship God in the worst of Circumstances you never know what is going to happen.

Worship sets the stage for miracles! Worship causes spiritual earthquakes that can change the topography of your life. Worship is a shifting of the tectonic plates in your life. It may not change your circumstances. But it will change your life.

Napoleon Hill said, “Every negative event contains within it the seed of an equal or greater benefit.”

I believe that. Worship is the way we stay positive in negative circumstances. And it’s not a placebo! It’s reality.

Will Hammer at Fryathon
No matter how bad things get, as a follower of Christ, I have eternity in heaven to look forward to! My pain is real. But so is heaven. The good news is that this reality is temporary. That reality lasts forever!

The key is focusing on the right reality!

I read a fascinating statistic this week. Research indicates that the average person talks to himself or herself about 50,000 times a day.

Any guess on what percentage of self-talk is negative? Research indicates that 80% of self-talk is negative.

We say negative things to ourselves. I’m not good enough. I’m not smart enough. And, doggone it, people don’t like me. So here’s what happens: we let what’s wrong with us keep us from worshipping what’s right about God. We’re focused on the wrong reality.

In her book, Mindfulness, Ellen Langer says that all of us have “premeditated cognitive commitments.” Translation: we tend to see what we’re looking for.

A pessimist will always see something bad in a good situation and an optimist will always see something good in a bad situation.

Paul gives some priceless advice in Philippians 4:8. It’ a list of eight premeditated cognitive commitments. He says, “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

A worshipper always finds something to praise God for because they’re looking for something to praise God for. Worship is a premeditated cognitive commitment based on ultimate
*Consider the worshipper’s chains*

Here’s a closing thought: the circumstances you complain about becomes chains that imprison you. Worship is the way out.

It was worship that set Paul and Silas free physically. And it’s worship that will set you free emotionally and spiritually. Worship sets off a chain reaction. The prison doors fly open. The chains break, freedom follows.

Are there circumstances that you’re allowing to imprison you? Have your complaints about someone or something become chains?

Ask the people you live with; the people who know you best – am I a negative or positive person? So I spend more time complaining or giving praise?

Stop focusing on what’s wrong about you or your circumstances. Start focusing on what’s right about God. Here’s an assignment. Find something everyday to be grateful for. It’s a spiritual discipline.

Psalm 103:2 says, “Praise the Lord and forget not all his benefits.”

In the words of the hymn: “Count your blessings. Name them one by one. Count your many blessings. See what God has done.” Your WORSHIP will determine your REALITY!