

# **Authentic Church**

## **Study Guide**

# AUTHENTIC CHURCH

## STUDY ONE | Passionate Worship

In the sermons on Sunday we explored the Biblical principle that worship is not just about what we do on Sunday. It's not just about singing. It's not just about praying. Worship involves the whole of our lives. It is glorifying God by enjoying who he is.

However, the Bible does attach great significance to focused, intentional worship – both privately and in corporate gatherings. In this study, we'll be focussing on the *content* of our worship. Whether it be in our private prayers, our Sunday services, or in our small groups throughout the week: how does the Bible model worship for us?

To do this, we're going to use Israel's 'songbook' – the Psalms – to see a model of how we are to worship God corporately. We're going to look at several different types of Psalm, each relating to a different aspect of worship, to see what we can learn. As we do this, we'll also keep in mind that we are *not* the Old Testament nation of Israel! We're a people gathered from all nations, who live on the other side of some pretty significant events – Jesus' death and resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

What do the Psalms have to say to *us* about how we ought to worship our great God?

**Note to leaders:** *if you only make it through a couple of these Psalms, that's fine! Focus on quality discussion rather than 'getting through all the questions'. Encourage group members to do the rest during the week.*

*If you have a large group, an alternative way to do this study is to break into smaller groups and look at one or two Psalms in each group. Meet in the larger group at the end, and get each group to summarise what they learned.*

### 1. Songs of entering into God's presence (Psalm 24)

Some of Israel's Psalms are simply about entering into the presence of God. For example, **read Psalm 24:1-6**.

Although God is not limited to a specific location (see vv1-2), there is a particular place in which he may be found (v3, his 'holy hill', Mount Zion, the location of the tabernacle).

a. Where is God's presence today?

b. Can we still 'enter God's presence', or is this Psalm now irrelevant? If so, how is it different?

c. What were the conditions of being able to enter God's holy place (vv3-4)? Why were such conditions necessary?

d. How did the Israelites meet these conditions?

e. How have these condition been met today? Is there still anything we need to do when we enter God's presence?

f. What do you do to prepare to 'enter God's presence'? Have you been challenged to do things differently?

*Allow a few minutes for private prayer & confession before moving on.*

## **2. Songs declaring God's greatness (Psalm 96)**

Some of Israel's Psalms are not sung *to* God, but *about* God, in the third person. For example, **read Psalm 96**

a. Why do we sing about God in the third person? (See e.g. vv1, 3, 5, 7)

b. What is the content of this kind of praise? Just from this psalm, list all of the reasons to praise God.

c. Has any of this changed, or can we still praise God for the same things?

Many other Psalms of this kind (e.g. Ps78) focus on the defining event in Israel's history – their rescue from Egypt and entry into the Promised Land.

d. How has *this* changed? That is, what is the defining event of *our* history as the people of God?

Bob Kauflin, writing to worship leaders in his book *Worship Matters*, says this: 'If we help people focus on what God did two thousand years ago rather than twenty minutes ago, they'll consistently find their hearts ravished by his amazing love.'

e. How is the cross central to *your* worship of God? How is it central to our *church's* worship?

### 3. Songs of thanksgiving (Psalm 30)

Thanksgiving Psalms are directed *to* God, rather than sung *about* him. They express our deep gratitude for what he has done for us. **Read Psalm 30.**

a. For what is the Psalmist thankful?

b. For what are *you* thankful?

c. The Psalmist has been brought back from the brink of death (v3). How is our experience of God's deliverance even greater?

d. What reason does the Psalmist give for God to spare his life (v9)? How is the Psalm itself an outworking of this reason?

e. 1 Peter 2:9 reminds us that it's still our job to 'declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light'. How might we make our thanksgiving – our expressions of gratitude – more public?

*Have a brief time of prayer, giving thanks to God for all that he's done for us.*

#### **4. Songs of lament (Psalm 31)**

About a third of the Psalms are laments. These Psalms, like thanksgivings, are addressed directly to God. On one level, they are complaints – telling God that things aren't the way they're supposed to be, and asking him to fix them! Yet at another level, they're also expressions of confidence in God, that he *is* able to fix things. **Read Psalm 31:1-18.**

a. About what sorts of things is the Psalmist complaining (vv9-13)?

b. *Briefly(!!)* - over what sorts of things do you lament in your life?

c. How can the existence of laments (and in such quantity!) give us encouragement?

d. How does the Psalmist express his confidence in God?

e. How are Psalms of lament – even those which sound the most desperate & hopeless (e.g. Ps 88) – still expressions of confidence in God?

f. Upon what basis can we be even *more* confident that God will answer us?

g. What, then, is the difference between a Christian lament and just having a whinge? How is a lament still an act of worship?

*Conclude in prayer, bringing your 'laments' to God. Plead with him to 'fix things' that are not right. Acknowledge that some things might not be fixed until the coming age. Ask for patience and joy in the meantime as we endure the imperfections of this present age.*

## STUDY TWO | Loving Community

In his book, **'Transforming your Church'** Mark Conner writes,

'For too long, church has become a thing we go to, an event or an experience, rather than a community of people networked together in loving relationships. The Church is to be much more than a crowd gathering for an event. It is to be a closely networked group of people serving Christ together. Genuine loving relationships provide the care that people need and the context in which life transformation can take place.' [p70]

An authentic church is a loving Christ centred community. In this study we will examine what a loving community should look like and then explore how to better build this type of community, an authentic church.

1. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said,

**"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

- a. Share with your group one or two examples where you have experienced the love of other believers.
- b. Now share one or two examples where you have shown love to other believers.
- c. Share one thing that you think would make our Sunday gatherings more loving.
- d. Shared one thing that you think would make your home group more loving.

2. **Read Acts 2:41-47.** In this passage we see God's new community, the church, living in community. What were the distinguishing marks of this new community? To what extent does our church or your home group imitate this community? In what areas do we need to grow?

3. The New Testament gives us a direct command to 'love others' over fifty-five times. God wants our love to grow and mature [Phil. 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:21-22]. The greatest commandments are about love because life is all about loving God and loving people [Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14]. Love though is more than a feeling. It is a decision to do good to others despite the cost. Jesus demonstrated his love by giving his life for us on the cross. True love is often costly. The apostle John writes, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." [1 John 3:18]

The following **'one another'** statements will show you some key ways in which you can authentically show love to others.

Look up each verse, determine the **key principle** and explore how you can put this into practice in both your home group and the wider church.

Hebrews 10:24

Hebrews 10:25

Galatians 6:2

James 5:16

Galatians 5:13

Colossians 3:16

1 Peter 4:9

Ephesians 4:2

Ephesians 4:32

4. Pray together and for each other that God will help you to play your part in building an authentically loving community – in your home group as well as the wider church.



# STUDY THREE | Costly Discipleship

## Introduction

God's goal for every Christian disciple is that he be conformed to the likeness of his Son, Jesus. "For those God foreknew he also predestined ***to be conformed to the likeness of his Son***, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." [Rom. 8:29] God wants to make us like Jesus. To reflect Jesus' values, attitudes and character. God will do whatever is necessary to make us like his Son.

In this study we will examine how God makes us like Jesus.

### 1. Through God's Spirit working in us

**"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect [behold] the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. [2 Cor. 3:18]"**

- a. What is the goal of God's work in Christians?
- b. What is the means of transformation?
- c. What is the process of transformation?
- d. There is conflict in the process of becoming like Christ. What do Gal. 5:17 and Rom. 7: 14-15 tell us about this conflict?

Jerry Bridges writes in his book 'The Discipline of Grace'

'Sin is like a defeated army in a civil war, instead of surrendering and laying down its arms, it simply fades into the countryside, from which it continues to wage a guerrilla war of harassment and sabotage against the government forces. Sin as a reigning power is defeated in the life of the believer, but it will never surrender. It will continue to harass us and seek to sabotage our Christian lives as long as we live.'

How do you experience the battle with sin in your own life?

### e. Who is the agent of transformation?

## 2. Through the grace of God [Titus 2:11-12]

The grace that saves us is also the grace that transforms us into the likeness of Christ.

**“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...”** [Titus 2:11-12]

a. What does God’s grace teach us to say ‘no’ to?

Share an example of where you have said ‘no’.

b. What does God’s grace teach us to say ‘yes’ to?

Share an example where you have said, ‘yes’.

As well as learning to say no and yes, the apostle Paul in Ephesians encourages us to **‘put off and put on’**.

***“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*** [Eph. 4: 22-24]

Jerry Bridges uses the following helpful analogy:

“I like to think of this twofold approach of ‘putting off’ and ‘putting on’ as represented as two blades of a pair of scissors. A single scissors blade is useless as far as doing the job for which it was designed. The two blades must be joined together at the pivot point and must work in conjunction with each other to be effective. The scissors illustrates a spiritual principle. We must work simultaneously at putting off the characteristics of our old selves and putting on the characteristics of the new selves. One without the other is not effective.”

## 3. Through disciplining ourselves

We have spoken about the Spirit’s role as we behold the glory of Christ in the gospel and the grace of God in making us more like Jesus!

That does not mean that we sit back and do nothing. We need to depend on God’s grace and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But we also need to be disciplined in the exercise of spiritual disciplines.

In Hebrews 12:14 we read **“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”** In 1 Timothy 4:7 Paul exhorted Timothy to train himself, or to discipline himself to be godly. [‘train yourself to be godly’]

The following are a list of spiritual disciplines that can assist you in becoming a spiritually mature disciple of Christ. Consider how well you are doing in each discipline and what you may need to do to grow in a specific area. **Discuss, plan and take action!**

**a. Fellowship – meeting regularly with God’s people [Heb. 10:25]**

**b. Prayer [Col. 4:2-3]**

**c. The word [Rom. 12:2; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Ps. 119:9-16]**

**d. The discipline of commitment [Rom. 12:1]**

"A cartoon in a daily paper showed a man ready to leap from the ledge of a high-rise apartment building with a suicide note in his hand but with a parachute strapped to his back. His wife leaning out the window, says to him, 'Just can't make a commitment to anything can you, Larry'.

We live in a society averse to making commitments. Romans 12:1 is a call to commitment to God in view of his mercy. **"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship."** Our commitment to God is a powerful tool in the pursuit of holiness.

Let me [Ange] illustrate:

"I made an exclusive commitment to my wife when I married her. That commitment is a stimulus to love and serve her and seek her best. But also, that commitment to her makes it much easier for me to resist the competing appeal of other women. The appeal and temptation is still there, but my commitment to Linda disciplines/trains me to be faithful to her and say no to immorality. My commitment to my children also ensures that I remain faithful to my wife."

#### **e. The discipline of watching**

Jesus said to his disciples,

**"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."**  
[Matt. 26:41]

We need to be spiritually alert or we'll fall into temptation. Satan is at work to tempt us, our society seductively promotes ungodly lifestyles and our own flesh continues to fight the Spirit's leadings. We need to know our weaknesses well and be honest about the areas where we might fall. Eg. Loss of temper, deceit, revenge, divisiveness, gossip, lust, etc. We must put checks in place to guard ourselves.

#### **f. The discipline of service [1 Peter 4:10-11]**

One of the best ways to pursue holiness is to be engaged in loving service. Do you want to pursue holiness? Do you want to become like Christ? Do you want to mature as a Christian? Then don't just come to church, but find a ministry, whether public or private, official or unofficial and begin to serve. When you are busy doing the Lord's work there is less time for sin and rebellion. So where do you or will you serve?

#### **4. Through trials and troubles**

a. Read James 1:2-4, Rom. 5:3-4

How do trials and troubles help us to become more like Jesus?

Illustrate from your own life how a difficult experience helped you to grow in spiritual maturity.

b. Read Rom. 8:28-29

“This is one of the most misquoted and misunderstood passages in the Bible. It doesn’t say, ‘God causes everything to work out in the way I want it to.’ Obviously that’s not true. It also doesn’t say, ‘God causes everything to work out to have a happy ending on earth.’ That is not true either. There are many unhappy endings on earth.” Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, p195.

What does the passage say?

What is God’s purpose for those who love God?

#### **5. Prayer**

Pray for each other that trusting in God’s grace and the power of God’s Spirit you will exercise the spiritual disciplines that will help you to become more like Jesus.

## STUDY FOUR | Engaging Mission

In the sermons on Sunday we looked at God's heart for mission, and some of the ways we are called to be involved. In this study, we're going to focus on one particular aspect of mission. You could call it by the trendy term 'dialogue evangelism'. But it's simply the process of engaging people in conversations about God.

There are many examples of this provided for us in the Bible, but here we're going to look at just one: the example of Jesus in John chapter 4. In this story, we see Jesus engaging in conversation with a Samaritan woman in a deliberately intriguing way. In a few short steps, he moves from an everyday interaction to matters of deep spiritual significance, just by being intentional about the conversation.

Read the story in John 4:1-42, and then look at seven things we can learn from Jesus' example. (For more background to the story, during the week you can have a listen to [www.narweebaptist.org.au/sermons/20081026pm.mp3](http://www.narweebaptist.org.au/sermons/20081026pm.mp3))

### 1. Engaging mission crosses social boundaries (vv4-9)

In speaking with the Samaritan woman Jesus was breaking three important social conventions:

- (1) Jesus was a Jew, and Jews didn't associate with Samaritans (v9) because of a long-running ethnic-religious feud;
- (2) Jesus was a man, and she was a woman who was not a close relative;
- (3) She was a woman 'of reputation' and therefore an outcast. This is stated in v18, but also implied by the fact that she's fetching water alone, in the middle of the day, when none of the other women of the village would be around.

Yet this doesn't bother Jesus. His example foreshadows a great theme of the New Testament – where the gospel goes out regardless of gender, race or socio-economic status (Gal 3:28).

a. Our culture is vastly different from that of Jesus' day. What kind of social boundaries exist today? What can stop us from interacting with people who are significantly different from us?

b. What social boundaries have you crossed in your own personal witness?

c. What boundaries do you feel God is calling you to cross in the future? Or calling our church to cross?

## **2. Engaging mission creates intentional interactions (vv10-15)**

Jesus began the conversation by asking for a drink. But it's clear he wanted much more than that out of this interaction. He knows what his follow-up is going to be:

v10 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'

He deliberately intrigues her with this idea of living water. Read again vv11-15.

a. What does the woman think Jesus means by 'living water'?

b. What opportunity does her response (v15) give Jesus?

In a few short steps, Jesus has gone from asking her for a drink, to being asked to explain the gospel! All because he made some deliberately intriguing statements about living water.

c. Have you had any conversations you've been able to turn into gospel-conversations in this way? Share with the group.

d. Brainstorm ideas of how to turn everyday interactions into gospel-conversations using leading questions, or intriguing statements.

Some examples to get you started:

- At Christmas, casually asking 'what does your family do to celebrate Christmas?', knowing that if the person follows the normal rules of social etiquette, they'll ask you the same question back.
- Drop Christian concepts – such as prayer or your home group – into the conversation, and see if anyone gets intrigued.
- The proliferation of Christian denominations, while making us look divided, can also be a way in. If you can get someone to ask you 'why are there so many denominations?', you're already half-way to explaining grace vs works, which is the essence of the gospel!

### **3. Engaging mission offers satisfaction to those who thirst (vv13-14)**

If we talk about point 2 (above) for too long, people can become uneasy. Are we just trying to manipulate people? To sell them something? Are we just another marketing campaign?

a. What is the aim of a marketing or political campaign?

b. Read vv13-14. What is the aim of our gospel witness?

c. What is the key difference?

d. How ought this to motivate us?

### **4. Engaging mission doesn't avoid the difficult questions (vv16-20)**

Read vv16-20. Although Jesus is presenting the good news of eternal life, he doesn't shy away from dealing with the woman's sin. Engaging mission isn't just about presenting how wonderful life with Jesus will be. It's also about confronting people, tactfully, with their own sinfulness before a holy God. Jesus doesn't avoid this, but meets it head on.

a. In speaking with a non-believer, have you ever confronted them with the Biblical idea of sin? If so, how did it go?

b. How might we bring up this idea? And at what point in the relationship should we do so?

Other difficult questions we're tempted to avoid relate to people's objections to the gospel: past hurts at the hands of Christians, or tragedy for which they blame God. The awkwardness of these moments can mean that we miss out on gospel opportunities. Yet often, precisely when it *gets* awkward is when people are most open.

c. Have there been any awkward moments when you've had spiritual conversations with others? What happened? Did both of you avoid going further? Or did it lead to deeper, more fruitful discussion?



The woman in the story tried to avoid (vv19-20) by bringing up an age-old religious dispute between the Jews & Samaritans. The ancient equivalent of, 'so, how about that weather we're having...', trying desperately to change the subject. But Jesus wasn't so easily distracted...

### **5. Engaging mission points people away from religion & toward relationship (vv21-26)**

Read vv21-26 to see how Jesus responds.

a. How does Jesus respond to the dispute over 'rules' about where one ought to worship?

b. What does Jesus offer in place of 'religion'?

Bill Hybels often uses the line 'I'm not a religious person' as a way of intriguing people into a spiritual conversation. OK, so it helps that he's a pastor, which makes it a more shocking statement!

c. But what are some ways in which *you* can point people away from religion & rules about pleasing God, and toward a relationship with Jesus?

### **6. Engaging mission seeks to impact a whole network (vv28-30, 39-42)**

The disciples come back at this point, and the woman scurries off like a frightened rabbit. But it actually has a positive effect: read vv28-30. A little later, the whole village has been impacted by her testimony: read vv39-42. One intentional conversation, and yet the ripple effect brings the gospel to a whole network of people!

a. In *your* life, was there one person through whom the gospel came to your family / workplace / school? Tell the group about it.

b. Is there anyone you know who could be the gateway to a whole network, if you began to engage them in gospel conversations? Write their names down, and at the end of the study pray for opportunities to speak to them.

## **7. Engaging mission delights in the task (vv31-38)**

The disciples return, bringing Jesus food. But Jesus is at his intriguing best, talking about already having food 'that you know nothing about'. What's he talking about? Read vv31-35.

a. What is Jesus' 'food'? Why does he call it food?

b. Is this your food, too? What often stops us from feeling like it?

c. What steps can we take to keep our mission a delight, rather than a duty?

## **Conclusion**

What about Jesus' example in John chapter 4 has impacted you the most? What can you put into practice this week?

Pray for one another:

- that God will give us the ability to go and do what we've just heard;
- for opportunities to begin spiritual conversations with specific people – both those listed before (6b, above) and others.