

A.W. Tozer was the pastor of Southside Alliance Church in Chicago for 30 years. During that time, he wrote a dozen books. One was titled The Pursuit of God. And in it, he spoke about the Bible, saying *“It is not mere words that nourish the soul, but GOD . . . and UNLESS and UNTIL hearers find God in personal experience, they are not better off for having heard the truth. The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring people to the knowledge of God.”* The same thing can be said about the elements of worship: they are not ends in themselves, but a means to bring people into relationship with God. And that is true if we worship by ourselves in a park, with a few others on a beach, or in a church sanctuary with lots of other people.

That is because in commanding us to worship, God was giving us a tool to figure out the kind of world HE desires to exist. In telling us what it means to worship, God was giving us a device to use to figure out how to live in the kind of world HE desires to exist. And in giving us the worship activities we label *“acts of worship,”* God was giving us the means by which we could figure out not only how to be in relationship with Him but also with others. For one triad of ways God wants to guide our lives are acts of love, mercy, and justice - as those are the core qualities of God Himself, the Being in whose *“image”* and *“likeness”* we were created.

But because of the presence of sin in our lives, that image has been marred. So living in ways of love, mercy, and justice no longer comes naturally to us. As a result, we must work to figure out how to live in such holy ways. And one of the ways we are called by God to do that work is in acts of worship. This is why we use the word *“liturgy”* to describe the acts of worship in a church service. The word *“liturgy”* literally means *“work of the people.”* That is because in doing that *“work”* on a regular basis (in both private and corporate times of worship), we are able to figure out the kind of world GOD desires to exist, figure out how we are to live in the kind of world GOD desires to exist, and figure out how to do so in a way that we not only live in relationship with God but also with others in acts of love, mercy, and justice.

And the reason we need to do that work is that the choice before us in life is not IF we will worship, but WHAT or WHO we will worship. For EVERYONE worships. But what or who we worship, may not be WHO we should be worshipping. And that is true even if we claim we believe in God. This is why Jesus replied to a man who asked Him to name the greatest commandment by saying *“love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”* It is why the Apostle John wrote *“do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.”* And it is what we get a picture of in Isaiah 6 .

For in that passage from Isaiah, we see a pattern for how we should worship the One True God. In that passage, we see how to go about receiving the benefits of centering our lives around the One who is the ultimate reality of life. And in that passage, we see what it means we are to do in response to the changes that happen in our lives when we worship the One True God. To see this, let’s turn to the verses that were read from Isaiah 6.

The book of Isaiah opens with the prophet saying he wrote down a “*vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*” Over the next 5 chapters, Isaiah then laid out that vision, explaining what God told him the people were doing wrong, that they needed to repent, and how He would respond if they did not do so. Chapter 6 then opens with the statement “*in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*” Just like the visions Isaiah spoke about in the previous 5 chapters, these words are a revelation. But this revelation is different. The previous visions were about what God was doing in response to the people’s waywardness. This vision was about God calling Isaiah to be a prophet in the midst of what He was doing in response to the people’s waywardness.

But biblical scholars see more than just the calling of a prophet in this passage. That is because when Isaiah has this vision, he responds by choosing to worship. And because he chooses to worship, biblical scholars say this passage shows us how we all are to worship God. This means this passage can help us answer the question “*What are the elements of worship?*” But this is not the only place in the Bible where we see things we label as “*elements of worship.*” In Psalm 95, for instance, we are told to “*sing for joy to the Lord.*” We are told to “*come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.*” And we are told to “*kneel before the Lord our Maker.*” All of which have parallels here in Isaiah. To see that, let’s turn back to Isaiah 6.

In verse 1, we are told the prophet “*saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*” Biblical scholars say this verse gives us the first essential element of worship: we must seek to enter into the presence of God. But this can be a confusing because we know that God is everywhere. Psalm 139 notes this, asking rhetorically “*where shall I flee from your presence?*” And Proverbs 15 says the “*eyes of the Lord are in every place.*” Which means that God does not need to be invited into our life like He is somewhere far off. What this element of worship therefore means is that we need to intentionally look for the presence of God. For while God is always present, we are often oblivious to His presence.

Isaiah then says he saw “*seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’*” This gives us the second essential element of worship: listening for (and responding to) God. For when we look for God, and see His presence around us, Isaiah says the experience can be as shocking as seeing “*the doorposts and thresholds shake and the temple filled with smoke.*” After all, this the Creator of the universe, the One who said “*let there be light,*” and there was light. The One who said “*let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night,*” and it was so. The One who said “*let us make humans in our image.*” For the Being of triune relationship who created us wants to speak with us, and to have us speak to Him.

This leads us to the next essential element of worship: thanksgiving. For when the prophet saw the presence of God, and heard God speaking to him, his reaction was to say “*I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.*” But God did not leave Isaiah in his guilt, for guilt is also just a means to an end. The end is salvation. So “*one of the seraphim flew*

to [Isaiah] with a live coal in his hand . . . [and] with it he touched [his] mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’” And that - redemption and salvation - is truly something for which to be thankful.

The last essential element of worship is going forth. That is because as a being of triune relationship, God invites us to be in relationship not only with Him, but also with our brothers and sisters. And He invites us to seek to be in relationship with Him and our brothers and sisters not just in this world, but for all eternity. For that to happen, however, we need to work with God to share His love with those brothers and sisters. We need to introduce them to Jesus. We need to help them become faithful followers of Him. And we need to equip them to then share His love with others. Which is why Isaiah tells us that when God said “*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*” he said “*here am I. Send me!*”

When you put that all together, you have something called the Four Fold Pattern of Worship: Entrance, Proclamation and Response, Thanksgiving, and Going Forth. In the essential element of Entrance, we are called to turn our attention to God. We are called to look for His presence. This can be done with the reading of a scripture or a “*call to worship*.” It can be done by singing songs. And it can be done in other liturgical acts and readings. But in whatever is done the intent is to intentionally direct our attention to the presence of God with us, and to “enter into” actively seek to meet God in that act of worship.

In the essential element of Proclamation and Response, we are called to seek to hear from God, and then to respond to God. This can be done through hearing scripture read. It can be done through teaching and preaching about a scripture. And it can be done in dramatic skits, readings, and videos. For these are not ends in themselves, but merely a means to an end: hearing God speak and responding to what God says. This means that as these things “proclaim” the Word to us, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us through them. And then we need to respond to what we hear. Like Isaiah, this may mean we need to repent. At other times, it may mean we need to make a vows of commitment or offer up prayers of intercession. But since, thoughts and prayers alone do not change the world. One more thing is needed.

In the essential element of Going Forth, we are called to go leave the sanctuary, and go out into the world, in God’s name to do God’s work. We are called to introduce people to Jesus, help them become faithful followers of Him, and equip them to share His love. AND we are called - like Jesus - to be willing to sacrifice to do so. That is because worship is not just what we do in a church service. Worship is everything we do in centering our lives around what we believe to be the ultimate reality of life, AND in helping those around us center their lives around the ultimate reality of life as well. We see this in a song by Matt Readman. It is titled I’m Coming Back to the Heart of Worship, and declares that “*a song in itself is not what . . . [God has] required.*” It says that God is looking “*much deeper*” than the words we speak in a sanctuary. And it states that God is looking “*through the ways things appear*” in our acts of worship to see if we are really “*all about Him,*” or just trying to make Him bring about OUR will on earth.

So, whether you worship by yourself in a park, worship with a few others on a beach, or worship in a church sanctuary with many other people, God invites you to do 4 things. He invites you to enter into acts of worship intentionally, looking for His presence around you. He invites you to listen for Him speaking to you in those moments, and to respond. He invites you to be thankful for what He says to you, and what He has - and will continue to do - for you as part of His work to redeem you and save you. And He invites you to go forth from your time of worship to live as His emissary - so others can be redeemed and saved as well.

If you are not doing those 4 things in the times you say you are worshipping God, then you are not truly worshipping God. For only when you do those things our acts of worship can we say we are worshipping the One True God. A.W. Tozer spoke about this reality of the essential elements of worship in another one of the 12 books he wrote. That book was simply titled Worship, but it contained a very profound statement. *“I do not believe it is necessarily true,”* Tozer wrote, *“that we are worshipping God when we are [merely] making a lot of racket.”* So how is it with you? Is what you do on Sunday in church (as well as at other times when you worship by yourself) considered by GOD to be worship? Or does GOD just view what you are doing as racket?