

**Worship • Ephesians 5 & Colossians 3**  
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Ephesians 5:15-21 and Colossians 3:16-17

**Big Idea: Wise people worship.**

**Intro:**

This whole month we have been talking about the rhythm of worship and a significant part of our discussion has been the reminder that worship is more than just singing on Sunday morning. It is about having reverence for God and remembering that he does not honor hypocrisy. Going through the right motions and performing the right kinds of rituals is not enough. Our hearts need transformation in order for our outward actions to have purpose and meaning. What we are going to step into today though is what happens to us when we worship. How does worship that is done with proper reverence and honor of God impact us? We know that it brings glory to God our Father, but how does it transform us? Let me pray and jump in.

Like many people my age, I had braces when I was a kid. However, before I could get the braces put on the dentist told me that I had to have one of my baby teeth removed. The problem was that it was not even loose, yet. My dad is a good negotiator and entrepreneur and he approached with a deal. He knew it would cost him a certain amount of money to have the dentist remove my tooth and so he offered to pay me if I would let him do it for me. He offered me \$20 to remove that tooth and I accepted. So, what kind of tool do you think he went to get? Yes, he grabbed pliers like you might expect and was ready to use those to pull out my tooth. If only that had actually solved the problem. Well, when he tried to pull it with the pliers he couldn't get a good grip on it and pull it out. So, he had to come up with another plan. He went back to the tool bench and was thinking how he pried things when they were stuck at work, my dad is a handyman, and he came to the conclusion that a flat head screwdriver would be a great tool for this task. He stuck that screw driver up into my gum and found a spot where he could pry against that tooth and managed to pop it out. Some of you are probably thinking that I am quite the sucker for \$20, but that seemed like a lot of money to me at the time. It was 2 books or several packs of baseball cards. It took a whole month to earn that much money any other way. Imagine though, if I told you that story without the context and just told you that my dad popped one of my teeth out with a flat head screwdriver. You would probably be asking me if there were any other children in the house and what kind of abuse I had faced as a child. However, when you give the details and the context that reorients our understanding of the story. You still might not think it was a good idea for me to have my tooth pulled that way, but it makes a lot more sense and it gives you a different sense of the story when you understand that it was a mutually agreed upon decision.

Today's passage in scripture reminds us of how worship helps reorient us as well. It helps pull our eyes up off of the challenges or difficulties that are right in front of us and on to the God who is over our circumstances. Let's jump into our passage and see how Paul encourages us to do this in **Ephesians 5:15-21 and Colossians 3:16-17**.

The first encouragement of this passage is to recognize that the days we are facing are evil. I hope this doesn't surprise any of you out there, but the world we live in is evil and broken. People take advantage of each other, they lie, they hurt one another, nations even go to war with one another and on and on. It has not changed since Paul's day. We are still in evil days. Humans are still fallen and messed up. He doesn't ignore this reality and just pretend that it isn't true. He calls it what it is. He connects with the truth of the reality of the situation. This is the why behind needing to live wisely. If we lived in a perfect world with no problems or potential ways in which we could become hurt, living wisely would not be nearly as important. If you are walking through a green field, you don't worry too much about where you are stepping. However, if someone tells you that the field you are walking through is where everyone takes their dogs to relieve themselves, you will be far more cautious about where you step. This is what Paul is talking about here, don't be dumb because our broken world will try and pull you into all kinds of traps. Be on your guard.

Now, when we think about wise living there are a certain number of ideas that might come into our heads. We might think about living honestly and telling the truth. We might think about being generous with our time and money. We might think about doing good research on a given topic before we make a decision as to what we think about that topic, but that is not what he recommends here. Those are the more noble things we might do with our recognition that the days we are living in are evil. We have far less noble activities as well. One of those is that we bury our heads in the sand and pretend that our world is not evil. We tell ourselves that our lives are not that bad, so we don't process the pain of our world at a deeper level. We just pretend that heartache and brokenness are not happening. This type of living doesn't demand much of us. We don't have to change or confront the brokenness of our world. We just get to walk through it. Another way we live unwisely, but may feel that we are living wisely is when we try to forcibly change the world around us. I know this is probably a bit unsafe to say, but Jesus doesn't ask us to force our morality on others through political means. This does not mean that we shouldn't vote our conscience or work actively against injustice. We can live unwisely though if we spend an inordinate amount of time looking to politics to restore the world. We also live unwisely when we just sit around and talk with our friends about how bad the world is. We can become almost spiritual in how good we are at analyzing the world and how bad it is or how much worse it is than it used to be. We can also just give up and give in. Well, things are bad and I can't change them, so there is no point in trying. Either I am going to get mine or just quit and give into addiction or despair.

In the moment, many of those failed tactics for dealing with an evil world can seem wise and helpful. They seem like they provide us a way out, but Paul tells us something that seems a bit counterintuitive. He tells us that when the days are evil we engage in Spirit filled worship. **In fact, that's the big idea for this week. Wise People Worship.** They allow the Spirit to fill them and have access to them and be empowered by him, they sing and speak the gratitude and praise to God over one another. What??! That seems like a crazy connection. Wise people worship? (With a question mark on the end). When facing an evil world, you are going to stop and sing? That is exactly what Paul tells us we should do. Why? Why would he tell us to face evil days with worship? I believe there are a few reasons.

Number 1, worship reorients my heart and my mind to what is actually true. Remember the story about the screwdriver and the tooth? Everyone is like, thanks Daniel I was trying to forget that. The full context of that story helps orient your understanding of it. If I just told you about my dad pulling my tooth, you might think my dad was cruel. Instead, you probably think that I was dumb or obsessed with money at the time. I would say, the two are not mutually exclusive. Worship does the same thing for my heart and mind. It helps me pull back and see the God who is bigger than the circumstances right in front of me. It helps me also understand that there is hope beyond what I am facing. Even though what I am facing might be tough, I remember that it isn't the whole story. Since I am originally from Denver, I have a picture that illustrates this point so clearly in my mind. When I am in downtown Denver and staring at the buildings all around me, I can't see past them at all. You can't really even see the tops of some of the buildings. They are so immense. Yet, if I can look at them from another angle, they seem tiny compared to the mountains. It makes me reorient myself. This is what worship does for us, it helps us make that shift.

Number 2, worship allows me to join with others and be formed by their faith as well. We shape one another when we sing and proclaim truth to one another out loud. This is one of the reasons that singing is such an integral portion of our services every week. I know our previous weeks have gone out of the way to say that worship is far more than just singing, but singing is a powerful vessel of worship. We get to adore the Lord and say it in front of others. The closest equivalent to this in our world right now is probably attending a sporting event or concert performance. We are moved in common because we are sharing in an experience. In fact those experiences are attempting to teach us that we are part of a larger community of people who love a certain kind of music or cheer for a certain kind of team. It is meant to be a communal experience. We share in this when we worship as the body of Christ whether in a large or small setting. We share truths with one another as we declare to one another what we believe to be true about the character and nature of God.

Finally, when we worship, we also connect with God in a unique way. In John chapter 4 when Jesus is talking with the woman at the well, he notes how true worshippers will one day worship in Spirit and in Truth and from later on in John we know that the Truth is Jesus himself. So, worship is a moment where we connect uniquely to the very heart of God. In

Ephesians, Paul talks about worship as being Spirit filled. There is a unique moment in worship when we are in the presence of God and that is what gives worship meaning and transformative power. I don't know if any of you have ever dealt with anxiety before, but I have dealt with it a little bit during a hard season of life. I knew mentally that I was not in danger, but I could not convince my body that it was true. We can have a lot of knowledge about what is true about God and his work in our lives, we can even sing about it, but if he is not present in and among us those truths in and of themselves will not lead us to freedom or transformation. It is as he dwells among us and applies these truths to our hearts that we experience the true power of worship.

Moving on in the passage to verse 20, Paul mentions something that should always be an aspect of our worship- gratitude. Worship should move us to gratefulness for God and what he has done in our lives. Giving thanks helps break the power of despair or entitlement in our lives. We recognize that it isn't about us and what we have achieved for ourselves, but about God and his work. I also love how Paul is pointing to the entirety of God's nature in this short little section of scripture. Our words and worship are Spirit filled. This leads us to gratefulness for God our Father as we worship in the name of Christ. If you are new to Christianity this whole concept of one God in three persons is confusing, but what is important to understand about it is that God is relational in his nature.

Paul provides one more rail for what true worship looks like in verse 21. As a community, we submit to one another. Submit is a tough word, but I think it is particularly relevant when we talk about worship. It also applies to our familial relationships if we were to read on in the passage, but I'll let Pastor Paul unpack that for you. You probably don't have to think too long and hard though about why submission to one another and worship go together. It means that we give up our right to control and allow someone else to have that control. I don't just grab onto what I want, but I see others and am willing to defer to what they need and sometimes even what they just want even if it is uncomfortable to me. I don't get to demand that we sing the songs that I like to sing. I allow others to experience worship that allows them to draw near to God. For some people, how they worship might be more through visual art or spending time in creation. I encourage them in that and allow them to seek God in their own way. At the same time, we don't use the word submit as a weapon to get others to bend to our will or make people afraid to state their opinions. Because we are submitting to one another, we shouldn't be afraid to express our desires and experiences. I have visited some churches where flags and dancing are a part of their expression of worship. That is really distracting to me, but it has great meaning to them. So, I would probably not choose to attend a church that worshiped that way every Sunday, but I would never ask them to change what they do because they connect with the LORD in that way. Not only that, it is actually good for me to experience unfamiliar worship once in a while because it challenges my categories. People dancing with flags often are worshipping God with reckless abandonment. I can learn from that. In the same way, a Roman Catholic worship service conveys a different sense of awe than what I normally experience. It

challenges me. It is okay to have preferences in worship style, but it is tragic when those preferences become barriers.

Ok, we have talked a lot about what we experience in worship and God's intent for worship. I want to loop back to what I think is most powerful about worship. When we think about wise living, worship is one of the wisest practices we have. Wise people worship because it connects us with God and others and reorients our hearts and minds to what is true. There was a season in my life when I was on the edge and perhaps over the edge of despair. In a tragic series of events, I lost a job I really loved and some relationships with people that I cared about. Despair and hopelessness would set in heavy some days. In those moments, I honestly did not know where else to turn except worship. More often than not that meant worship music because in that music I could hold onto truths about God that I was not experiencing in the moment. My heart and soul felt like they couldn't bear the weight of the sadness and pain, but through worship I was able to shift weight onto Jesus and let him carry it for a moment. My eyes shifted from what was right in front of me to the God who is over my circumstances. During that season, it also felt like a rock I could cling to in the middle of a raging river. I didn't have to worry about being swept away because I had something secure to hang onto.

There have also been other seasons in life where I experienced great joy and praise just flowed out of me during those seasons. The birth of my son was filled with so much joy I couldn't help but overflow in thankfulness. When I was doing camp ministry overseas and I saw young students come to believe in Jesus that same kind of joy overflowed into worship and praise. Worship is wise in those moments as well because it orients us correctly in a different way. It helps us recognize that Jesus is the one at work in our world. It helps remind us that we did not bring about whatever it is that we are rejoicing about. He is the one who did a great work in our lives. He gave my wife and I the gift of a son. He brought people to himself. I think we all have listened to enough podcasts and watched enough documentaries to know what happens when our heart shifts from worship of God to worshipping ourselves and what we think we have accomplished.

As we face days and a world that is evil, worship seems like a poor strategy. It seems ill-fitted to the task of challenging a world in need of transformation. Yet, a God who dies on behalf of his followers seems even more absurd. Yet, the truth is that this God was not scared even of death because he knew that the grave could not hold him. When we worship, we turn our eyes to that same God who in Jesus gave his life for us and overcame death. It humbles us and reminds us that we are not the heroes of the story and that anything good in our lives is a gift. At the same time, in the midst of dark times it reminds us that he is bigger than any challenge we face and gives us the courage to keep going and tackle even great challenges because we know that he is with us in the midst of it.

----- **Questions for Reflection** -----

1. How does true worship impact our view of ourselves and our circumstances?
2. In what ways does worship come easily to you? When do you find it difficult to worship?
3. What types or practices of worship help you connect best with Jesus?