

VINEYARD DISTINCTIVES



WHAT IS **WORSHIP?**

EXPERIENCING THE LIFE-CHANGING PRESENCE OF GOD

vineyardusa

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

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“COME, LET US BOW
DOWN IN WORSHIP,
LET US KNEEL BEFORE THE
LORD OUR MAKER; FOR
HE IS OUR GOD....”

PSALM 95:6-7A

INTRODUCTION: WORSHIP IN A VINEYARD CHURCH

If you have ever attended a worship gathering in a local Vineyard church setting, you may have noticed a few things during your experience.

As the musical part of the worship service began, you may have sensed anticipation in the congregation, like they were looking forward to what was about to happen. It's possible the worship leader communicated a sense of closeness and familiarity with God in his or her prayers, and that the leader was eager for the congregation to experience God in worship.

As those gathered began to sing, you may also have observed the abandoned expression of love freely being offered by the worshippers, and the music taking on a secondary place. As the songs played on, you may have thought that the people in the room seemed to be aware of God being present with them, that worship was *interactive*.

You may have noted those gathered were having an encounter with God as they sang songs about loving Jesus. Words of adoration, thanksgiving, and confession may have been sung or spoken, in simple or poetic ways. You may have seen people all around you with hands raised, singing passionately, or on their knees in devotion.

As the leader started and finished each song, you might have observed an absence of hype or stirring up of

emotion from the crowd. Maybe you sang for 20, 30, or even 45 minutes, moving in and out of songs with fluidity, as if they were prayers rather than just musical presentations.

On the lyric screen, it's possible you noticed that many of the songs being sung were published by *Vineyard Worship* or a group with Vineyard in the name.

Phrases like "the Kingdom of God," "I love you," and "Holy Spirit, come" may have been in the lyrics. After the message, as a time of prayer for individuals began, the band may have begun to play, accompanying a time of compassionate ministry.

If any part of what you just read is true of your experience, then you've probably already begun to taste the heart of what it means to us – as a Vineyard family – to *worship*.

In the following pages we'll look briefly at *who we worship*, *why we worship*, and *how we worship* – all from a Vineyard perspective. Then, we'll weave all those ideas together as we look at worship through the unique values of the Vineyard movement.

By the time you are finished, may you find your heart filled with a desire to express your love to God as He has expressed His love to you. The heart is where worship always begins.



WHO DO WE WORSHIP?

Early Encounters With God

The Vineyard movement has been said to be among the most significant early influencers of the contemporary worship movements of today. Over the last 30-40 years, experiencing God in gathered worship has been a hallmark of the Vineyard movement. This comes directly from our roots.

When the Vineyard movement was in its earliest years, John and Carol Wimber (John is regarded as the founding leader of the Vineyard) were meeting with a small gathering of worn-out leaders. They were all moved to deep repentance before God. As they spent time together worshipping and singing songs to God (rather than just about God), they experienced God's presence in deeply profound and personal ways. It is here that Vineyard worship was born.

Songs of intimate worship became a primary language of prayer for these broken people in those early days, and that love for experiencing God through worship music is now part of the genetic code of the Vineyard.

A Life-Giving Interchange

In those early gatherings, singing to God in worship was personal, and had as much to do with the "broken and contrite heart" (Ps. 51:17) of the person worshipping as it did with any melody they were singing. Though John was a professional musician and known for his expertise as a producer, his understanding of worship always had to do first with God's love, and our response to it. Simple worship songs seemed to help that life-giving interchange happen.

For that reason, Vineyard worship expressions have always been primarily musical in nature, and intimate in posture. In the Vineyard, the music facilitates the real point of why we've gathered – to meet face to face with the God of the Scriptures.

Who We Worship

When we worship, we make Christ the central focus of our affection. We sense God's presence with us, the Spirit of God touching us, and communicating to us the Father's love. The Bible shows us the nature of the glorious God we worship:

We worship God as *Creator* (Gen. 1:1) – the Father, maker and sustainer of all life, who began all things, and will bring history to its consummation.

We worship God as *King* (Ps. 103:19) – the Lord and sovereign over the cosmos, the benevolent leader of His Kingdom, and the One extending His rule through people who love Him and obey His word.

We worship God as *Trinity* (Deut. 6:4) – One God expressing Himself in three Persons, dwelling in perfect harmony within the Godhead – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We worship God as *Savior* (Matt. 1:21) – the rescuing God who by Jesus' life, death on a cross, and resurrection conquers sin and death, making us new creations in Christ.

All of these attributes of God inform our worship, from the way we prepare our hearts for the activity of worship, to the songs we write and choose for our set lists.

Worship is an end in itself – it is our opportunity to surrender ourselves again and again to our amazing God.

To use an analogy from the world of grammar, God is the Subject of our worship, who acts in love (the verb) toward us, the Object of His affection. We then respond in love, telling God how grateful we are to Him for all He has done, and is doing, in our lives.

As the adage says, we become like who or what we worship. We want to be like Jesus.

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OUTSET OF OUR MINISTRY,
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OF GOD.”

JOHN WIMBER

[REVISTING VINEYARD PRIORITIES: WORSHIP, VOL. 6, NO. 3, SUMMER 1992]



WHY DO WE WORSHIP?

We Are The Pursued

If you ask anyone who is attending church on a Sunday morning, "Why do we worship?" you'll probably get a variety of answers.

In the Vineyard movement, we believe the answer to this question is found in one short passage in 1 John 4:19. Though it is translated in a few different ways, the NKJV says this:

"We love Him, because He first loved us."

In those eight words we find not only the answer to why we worship, but also what it means to be God's child.

We express our love to God in worship not because we started this love relationship – but because God did! From Genesis to Revelation, God reveals Himself to be the Pursuer of your heart and mine. It is He who first loved us and pursued us, and it is we who are the objects of His undying affection. Worship is a simple *response* to God's unconditional love. We can complicate worship in a thousand ways, but we will always come back to this truth.

When we truly understand this reality, that God is the one who initiates the loving communion that is worship, it *changes* us. Rather than trying to gain God's approval by fulfilling religious obligations and doing the "right things" in worship, we can rest in knowing that God loves us before we even do one thing! Worship creates an environment where we can let go of our striving, and fall into the loving arms of the Father.

Like a child being hugged by a parent, we hear the words, "I love you, not because of what you do, but because of who you are!" When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus to tell her exactly how to worship in a way that would please God (John 4:19-24), Jesus responds by telling her what *kind of person* God is seeking as a worshipper.

Like this woman, many today think about worship in relation to the externals – the musical styles and religious habits that we

think please or displease God. But God is *always* looking at the heart, as it is in the heart that worship begins and ends.

When we are responding to God's love, we are putting God in His rightful place as the Subject of our worship. We then, as God reveals His love to us by His Spirit, respond to Him with love! This cycle goes on forever.

Ways We Express Our Love

For this reason, worship in the Vineyard is always interactive, as it has to do with both God and the people gathered. It is not personality-driven, by a superstar who takes up all the attention in the room. Rather, our worship leaders seek to cultivate humility and transparency even as they seek to lead effectively and with quality in the music.

This is why, in a Vineyard worship setting, you will see people actively demonstrating their love for God by lifting their hands (like we're receiving a gift), singing passionately (like someone expressing their love to another), or kneeling in thanks (like a person bowing to honor a King). God is our focus in worship.

These expressions above, and more, are ways we can biblically respond to God's love. As the Psalmist said, "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord" (Ps. 134:2); and "Shout to the Lord..." (Ps. 98:4-6). Musical instruments and more are involved in worship as they are all tools that can help us respond to God's love.

Vineyard Songs Around The World

As an overflow of our response to God's love, the worship music of the Vineyard has circled the globe for four decades. Born in intimate communion with God in our local churches, songs like *Come, Now Is The Time To Worship*, *Hungry, Breathe, Dwell*, and *Holy And Anointed One* (and thousands of others) have given the Body of Christ songs that say what we need to say to God.

Today, new Vineyard songs continue to pour out from our churches around the world.

"SING TO THE LORD
A NEW SONG; SING
TO THE LORD, ALL
THE EARTH. SING TO
THE LORD, PRAISE HIS
NAME; PROCLAIM HIS
SALVATION DAY AFTER
DAY. DECLARE HIS
GLORY AMONG THE
NATIONS...."

PSALM 96:1-3A

THE POWER OF A NEW SONG

According to Psalm 96:1, God is the One who gives *new songs* to every generation of the Body of Christ.

Songs can be very powerful, in that they are memorable, repeatable, encouraging, and contain biblical and theological ideas that sustain and guide us. The following are lyric excerpts from a variety of Vineyard songs.

If you know the song from which the lyric comes, begin to sing it, and let the Holy Spirit meet you as you draw near to God through the simplicity of a melody carrying the words. Make the song your prayer as you sing.

What joy is found // In communion with You // Bowing in reverence

There is no one like You // Risen Son of God // Holy is Your name

Exalt the Lord, our God // And worship at His feet

You'll see me through // You're the rock that will not be moved

Come, now is the time to worship // Come, now is the time to give your heart

Hungry, I come to You // For I know you satisfy

Lead on // Lord, lead on

You are great and wonderful // Yes, You are // Yes, You are

Open up my eyes // Let me see Your glory // See Your glory

Your love is deep, Your love is wide // And it covers us //

Your love is amazing // Steady and unchanging // Your love is a mountain // Firm beneath my feet

We sing // Come, Lord Jesus, come // Come, Lord Jesus, come

And I surrender // All to You, all to You // And I surrender // All to You, all to You

This is the air I breathe // Your holy presence, living in me

Draw me close to You // Never let me go // I lay it all down again // To hear You say that I'm Your friend

Jesus, Jesus // Holy and anointed One // Jesus

Faithful One // So unchanging // Ageless One // You're my rock of peace

I love // I love // I love Your presence // I love // I love // I love Your presence

That heals and sets me free // Pour it out // Pour it out

Move us, lead us // Send us, release us // To the broken, to the hungry

I want to know You // I want to hear Your voice // I want to know You more

Isn't He // Beautiful // Beautiful // Isn't He

HOW DO WE WORSHIP?

A Life Surrendered To God

One of the most quoted passages in the Bible, related to worship, is Romans 12:1. It says:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship."

If there was one thing that Paul (the writer of Romans) and the people of his time understood, it was that sacrifices are *dead*. In other words, when he talks about our lives being "living sacrifices" of worship, he is literally saying, "As dead as a *dead* sacrifice is, that is how *living* your life offering to God is to be – a complete and a done deal!"

This passage is telling us, through a metaphor, that the worship God seeks involves our *entire lives, offered as a response to His great love*. From the way we speak to our spouse, to the way we handle our money, love our neighbor, and work at our jobs, worship is an all-encompassing act. An old Latin phrase, *coram Deo*, sums up this kind of life. It means to "live before the face of God," or to "live in the presence of God."

When we gather to worship in a Vineyard context, we see it as a time of encounter, of refreshing, of empowering in the presence of God. That encounter touches us in the deepest places of our hearts, where God's

love can begin to change us from the inside out. We find courage to live, and strength to face our greatest challenges. Because we believe that everything we do flows out of our love relationship with Jesus, we create ample space in our worship settings for people to get beyond the words and music to actually sing to God and experience His manifest presence.

People who are desperately in love with Jesus are in a constant state of active and ongoing repentance from their sins. They overcome their insecurities and join God in His work of touching lives all around them. They let God lead in their lives, and it affects how they treat their co-workers, raise their children, and give their resources with generosity.

Kingdom Worship

Deep in the theology of the Vineyard movement is our commitment to the Kingdom of God being in our midst, as Jesus taught. The Kingdom of God is where God's rule and reign is active, and as we worship, we are yielding ourselves to become vessels through which our King can impact the world He so loves (Jn. 3:16).

Our worship practices are rooted in our theology of the Kingdom of God. Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God in two distinct ways. Sometimes, it seemed like the Kingdom of God was something that was



already present in his ministry. This is the Kingdom “Now.” Sometimes, it seemed like the Kingdom of God was something that was yet to come. This is the Kingdom “Not Yet.”

The Vineyard has always believed that healthy Kingdom worship recognizes this tension. At times, we experience the Kingdom as a present reality. The sick are healed. Justice comes for the oppressed. People struggling with mental illness are set free. At other times, the Kingdom does not come fully in the present. But we believe that one day, Jesus will return to make all things new – and in that day, all of our prayers for healing will be fully answered (*We Are The Vineyard*, p. 8).

The Now And Not Yet In Worship

How does this view of God’s Kingdom being “Now” and “Not Yet” influence how we worship? The songs that come from the Vineyard reflect this theological tension we see in the teaching of Jesus.

In a time of worship in a Vineyard, we may sing songs that celebrate God’s Kingdom being here, now, and breaking into our midst. These songs are filled with faith, joy, and celebration of God’s present, miraculous, saving work among us. God heals. God delivers. God reigns. These kinds of lyrics are in many of our songs, and are true.

In other worship songs, however, you will notice a different tone. These songs are also filled with faith, yet they give space for our longing for God in a broken world to be expressed. We live in this reality – some people are prayed for, and are not healed.

Devastation occurs due to earthquakes, disease, suicide – and our hearts break. Our own sin sometimes gets the better of us, and we must turn our hearts to repentance.

Our songwriters care for this side of the Kingdom “Not Yet” being expressed in our lyrics and approach to worship. Among our thousands of songs are lyrics like “Come, let us sing for joy!” as well as “Broken, I run to You for Your arms are open wide....” These kinds of songs stand side by side in our catalog, reflecting both of these realities of the Kingdom.

All are songs of worship, reflecting the diversity of the book of Psalms with its exuberant words of praise and contrasting cries of desperation. Some songs give us permission to shout with rambunctious joy at all God is doing in the world. Other songs give us permission to express longing, offer Jesus our pain, repent of sin, surrender our hardened heart, and to cry out to God for the oil of His mercy to comfort us. While this tension can be difficult to navigate, we in the Vineyard choose to hold the “radical middle” – as we worship a God who is present among us, in times of both joy and sorrow.

Worship Stirs Worship

As it says in the opening statement of this booklet, “In response to God’s initiative, we value the life-changing power of the experience of His presence. ...So, experience-based worship is the central activity of all that we do in the Vineyard. *It is worship that causes all else that we do to become an act of worship.*”

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OUR VALUES IN WORSHIP

The Vineyard movement is, at its very roots, a *worship movement*. Our vision of the fulfilled life is found in John 4:23-24, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

If God is always seeking honesty and authenticity, what “in truth” may mean in the passage above, then there is no aspect of life – no struggle, no victory, no challenge – that He will not use to open our hearts to His love.

Worship – Our Highest Priority

As John Wimber said in 1992, “We in the Vineyard have, from the very outset of our ministry, made worship our highest priority, believing that it is God’s desire that we become, first, worshippers of God.” For this reason, we value both a vision of worship that permeates every aspect of lives, as well as the gathered worship experiences that energize us and empower us as we say, “I love you, O Lord, my strength” (Ps. 81:1) in song.

In order to create worship environments that open the heart to God’s love in a give-and-receive posture, certain values shape our approach to gathered worship. Here are just a few:

We value *intimacy* with God, believing that making ourselves vulnerable to God’s Spirit as He has made Himself vulnerable to us is (Phil. 2:5-11) is vital to knowing God as He desires to be known.

We value *accessibility* in our worship environments, seeking to create an open path for every person, of every age and background, to meet with God.

We value *integrity* in our worship lifestyle, desiring for our lives to match the lyrics we sing – whether they be about caring for the poor, loving our neighbor, or joining God in His work.

We value *cultural connection* in our worship styles, appreciating that sounds and forms of music provide a “bridge for the heart” for different generations and people groups.

We value *Kingdom expectation* in our approach to worship leadership, believing that as we respond to God in song, His Spirit is with us to heal, deliver, and set us free – in the midst of worship.

These and other values shape both the content and style of our worship times in local churches. We value spiritual gifts, creativity, diversity, healing, prophecy, caring for the poor, and other themes that all impact the way worship is uniquely expressed in our churches.



Worship Overflows In Mission

Because the Vineyard movement is committed to equipping the saints for the work of ministry in all arenas of society (Eph. 4:12-16), we see our worship experiences taking us beyond our church services.

Worship, in our understanding of the Gospel, is to overflow in *mission*. We are committed to an understanding of worship that recognizes that we meet with God within the four walls of our churches to remember our calling, be healed in His presence, and offer God the praise that is due Him. Yet that experience also trains our hearts to express Jesus' love to a waiting world.

To use an analogy, we breathe in God's presence as yield to Him in worship, then we breathe out in fruitful work that heals individuals and society at large. For this reason, you may hear Vineyard leaders talking about worship in a way that goes beyond what happens when we gather to sing.

You will hear about worship being expressed through the giving of substance from our resources, caring for the poor, serving those in distress, praying for those in our workplaces, planting churches, administering justice, furthering the life of the mind in scholarship, and extending the Kingdom of God in every nation and people group.

To be a worshipping people, for us, is to experience the love of God – then to carry that love with us into a desperate world.

A Fresh Wind Of Courage

To be worshippers of God means that we are learning to love what God loves, and to hate what God hates. God loves people, and so we serve others as an act of worship.

When we experience Christ's reality in worship, we are healed by God's love, refreshed by God's presence, and empowered by God's Spirit. Strengthened by God in worship, week after week after week, we receive a fresh wind of courage to go into all the world "making disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

God Is Eager To Be Experienced

Worship has always been one of the hallmarks of the Vineyard. Many people describe their first moment in the Vineyard as being the moment in which they encountered God through intimate worship singing.

Worshipping and experiencing God goes far beyond singing. In every moment of our lives, we seek to live in the presence of the Lord. At the same time, corporate singing is a precious part of what it means for us to be the people of the Kingdom. In these times the Kingdom of God breaks in, and we, in the presence of Jesus himself, are changed.

Bless you as you experience God's presence in worship. May the reality of His love for you renew you, restore you, and compel you to join His Kingdom mission.

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REFLECTIONS

The late John Wimber, founding leader of the Vineyard, was a songwriter as well as a pastor, church planter, and church renewal leader. His heart for worship has impacted church leaders around the world, and his influence on the worship practices of the contemporary church cannot be overstated. Here are a few quotes from John about worship and its leadership.

“...We don’t use worship for anything else but to worship God – not even emotion. People are emotional and that’s fine, but we don’t use anything to cause the work of the Holy Spirit. Let God be God and do what He wills....”

“...Thus worship has a two-fold aspect: communication with God through the basic means of singing and praying, and communication from God through teaching and preaching the word, prophecy, exhortation, etc. We lift Him up and exalt Him, and as a result are drawn into His presence where He speaks to us....”

“Worship is not about personality, temperament, personal limitations, church background, or comfort. It’s about God.”

“...I think it’s important for our worship leaders in the Vineyard to know what they’ve been invited to. They lead us to the throne, but then they need to get out of the way. We’re not there to worship them, so they need to point us to Jesus... period.”

“Values affect what we think, and consequently, what we do. Our values are an intrinsic part of us, although we seldom think about them in a conscious fashion. They determine the ideas, principles, and concepts a person or group can accept, assimilate, remember, and transfer. They can be fallible and must be constantly revised and reviewed in the light of Scripture.”

“...Not only is it helpful to understand why and how we worship God, it is also helpful to understand what happens when we worship God. ...Keep in mind that as we pass through these phases we are headed toward one goal: intimacy with God. I define intimacy as belonging to, or revealing one’s deepest nature to another (in this case to God), and it is marked by close association, presence, and contact....”

- JOHN WIMBER

[Quotes excerpted from *Why We Worship & The Phases Of The Heart; The Values Of A Worship Leader; John Wimber Facebook Page*]

WORSHIP IS
NOT ABOUT
PERSONALITY,
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PERSONAL
LIMITATIONS,
CHURCH
BACKGROUND,
OR COMFORT.

IT'S ABOUT GOD.

The Vineyard Movement, since birth, has valued seeing individual Christians experience God in their daily lives. Through spiritual practices such as worship, fellowship, mission, the reading and application of Scripture, soul care, family care, healing of the broken, cultural influence, the compassionate ministry of the Holy Spirit, and loving our neighbors, the Vineyard community of churches seeks to be intentional about nurturing the lives of those who call us their family.

To find out more about the Vineyard, visit www.vineyardusa.org.
FOR MORE RESOURCES LIKE THIS, VISIT www.vineyardresources.com