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PLEASE READ

Welcome to *30 Days of Worship Discovery*, where you will learn about the New Worship Awakening and discuss ways to reenact and proclaim God's story through worship.

Together We Worship is an integral part of the process of focusing on worship which you, along with your friends and the church community, have elected to do.

So, let me tell you how to read and use this book in the *30 Days of Worship Discovery*.

Together We Worship supplements what you will hear in the **sermons** and see and hear in the **DVD presentations**. It also provides you with key insights for discussion in your **small group**. For these reasons, *Together We Worship* is a vital part of your total immersion in worship for a full month.

You will note that each of the four chapters is broken into six smaller units—one for each day from Monday through Saturday. These subdivisions allow you to read one idea at a time.

At the end of each day's reading there are several questions to help you reflect on what you have read and think about what you want to bring up in your small group and see implemented in the worship at your church.

I have written complex material in a simple, straightforward way. But I have not attempted to "dumb it down to junior high level." I have been in one too many small groups where the material was so simplistic that thinking was not encouraged.

Once in a while as you read, you may say "I am not getting it." But for the most part you will. If you come across a day's reading that is a stretch, skip

it, or, just identify one thing . . . an idea, a sentence, or a phrase, that you do understand. Then explore this one thought with others in your small group. Who knows what kind of insight you will achieve.

Remember, it is a total immersion in worship for a month. So by the time the month is over, you will have encountered the New Worship Awakening in four ways—through sermons, DVD presentations, reading, and discussion.

Below is how it all fits together, so review this and get a “feel” for the journey into worship you are now taking and how this book, *Together We Worship*, fits into the whole process.

SERMON TOPIC	DVD PRESENTATION	READING	GROUP
Week 1	God's Story	Ch. 1	<i>Follow the discussion</i>
Week 2	How Does Worship Reenact and Proclaim God's Story?	Ch. 2	<i>guide you will receive each week</i>
Week 3	How Do We Respond to God's Story?	Ch. 3	
Week 4	How Do Space, Music, and the Arts Serve God's Story?	Ch. 4	

Happy reading!
Blessed worship,
Robert Webber, www.ancientfutureworship.com

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to first thank Northern Seminary for providing me with the William R. and Geraldine Myers Professor of Ministry Chair. This position, with its limited teaching expectations, blesses me with a greater amount of time for writing. I have used that time to prepare *30 Days of Worship Discovery* and this book, *Together We Worship*, which is part of the “30 Days.”

Parts of this book have been drawn from my articles in *Worship Leader* and from other books, especially *Blended Worship*. This material has been rewritten and adapted to the particular style demanded of the *30 Days*.

A word of thanks belongs to some very special people who have played an important role in its production. First, to my faithful administrative assistant Ashley Gieschen. She is more help to me than I could ever express. Thanks also go to Nancy Taylor for her expertise as editor, to Amy Martin, for her good cover art, to Miriam Warren for her work on the book layout and to my special production people from ABS printing, especially the President Ken Vanderveen and my personal agent, Tim Lyman. All these people have played an important part in the development of the *30 Days* ministry.

And my wife, Joanne, is always there encouraging and supporting me in this and other ministries.

Special thanks to all these people!

PREFACE RECOVERING GOD'S STORY

I want to make a few comments about the subtitle to this book, *Recovering God's Story*.

We live in a world where there are many stories—many ways that people interpret and therefore see the world. For example, just go back to the twentieth century and think about the stories that dominated our world:

- Hitler created the story of Fascism and set out to rule the world through the Aryan race.
- Marx created the story of Communism and set out to rule the world.
- The Secularists created the story that there is no God and that we humans, left on our own in a cold and indifferent world, must learn to make our own way.
- Then came the new religions from the East. They said God is the world and the world is God. So they sought to narrate the world through a resurrected pantheism.

In the meantime, Christianity became increasingly privatistic. We stopped thinking about the story of God. The Christian convictions of Creation, Incarnation, death, Resurrection, and the return of Christ to establish a new heaven and new earth where Jesus is Lord over all creation as *the story of the world* was neglected. In place of the whole story we concentrated on this piece or that piece of the story. So the story of God as the interpretation of the world from its beginning to its ending simply fell into disuse.

Instead of focusing on God and God's story, we followed the

emphasis of the narcissistic culture and became interested in *self*. This concern for self was translated into the Christian faith, and into worship and preaching in particular.

For many the issue became “how can God help me?” How can God make my life better? How can I be filled with joy? How can I recover from a divorce? How can I get my life together and be productive? There is nothing wrong with these questions. People have to deal with these issues. However, the primacy given to these questions in recent years is narcissistic and not really what God’s good news is really about.

The good news is that God the creator has a plan for his universe. That plan has been revealed in Jesus Christ, whose incarnation, death and resurrection, and coming again constitute not only God’s story, but in reality the story of the world.

Now, here we are in the twentieth-first century. We battle with contending stories of the world. Communism is still a way to view the world. Atheism lurks in the corner. Eastern religions are still attracting many people. And now the terrorists are saying, “We will take over the world and bring you all under Shira Law. You will become enslaved by our laws, and we will terrorize you until you succumb.”

In the meantime, the world is up in flames, so to speak. Europe is under attack. Africa is in a tailspin with Aids, poverty, and genocide.

In a world that is disintegrating, somebody is going to narrate the world. Christians can’t narrate the world with a privatistic, narcissistic religion. So Christians must once again become united, not in whining about their pain and brokenness, but *in a hope for the future because they are recovering God’s story*.

In worship we reenact and proclaim that story. We tell and enact the meaning of the world because we proclaim the truth of the world.

The truth is, God created everything.

The truth is, we fell away from God through the sin of rebellion.

The truth is that God has become involved in the history of the world to rescue the world and restore it.

The truth is that God has rescued the world from the inside. He became one of us in the Incarnation. He died for us as our sacrifice, saving us from sin. In his resurrection, he destroyed death and began a new creation. He is Lord over all creation, and at the end of history he

will destroy the presence of evil in this world and reign forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

The subtitle of this book says when we worship together we are *recovering God's story*. This story is much bigger than our individual lives. It is more than a narcissistic preoccupation with self. It is all about God who in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit has won back the world for God.

When we worship we reenact and proclaim God's story to the eternal praise of God. That is what the *30 Days* are about and that is what *Together We Worship* presents.

True worship puts you into God's story. It changes your life because it puts your day-by-day experience of life—the disappointments and the things that make you soar—into the perspective of God's story. It reminds you of the true story of the meaning of the world and puts into perspective the place your life has in the grand story.

So plunge into the *30 Days*, into this book and the discussions with others which this book initiates. Find your place in God's story of the world which worship proclaims, and learn to interpret the struggles of your life within the big picture of God's story.

The Lord be with you,

Robert Webber

Week One

GOD'S STORY
WORSHIP IS TRIUNE



ST. PATRICK'S SHAMROCK

The use of the shamrock as a sign of the Trinity originates from the legend of St. Patrick. It is reported that when the pagans demanded he prove the Trinity to them, he plucked a shamrock leaf and asked, "Do I hold one leaf or three leaves? If one, why are there three lobes of equal size; if three, why only one stem?" His accusers were silenced, for they could not explain. He then said, "if you cannot explain so simple a mystery as the shamrock, how can you hope to understand one so profound as the Holy Trinity?"

INTRODUCTION

Day One

I RECENTLY SPOKE to the former director of worship for a whole denomination. He had just returned from a conference on worship where he had challenged the ministers to focus their energy on worship renewal. I asked, “In your mind, what was the most important point you made with these pastors about worship renewal?” He answered quickly and without hesitation: “I told them, ‘Get your definition of worship straight. Everything you do in worship renewal will flow out of that definition.’”

I fully agree with his advice. The practice of our worship today is directly related to what we believe worship to be. If a church claims worship is teaching, its worship will consist of a few “preliminaries” and a long sermon. If a church sees worship as evangelism, its entire service will move toward the invitation. If a church views worship as essentially praising God, it will worship primarily in song, relying especially on those songs that praise God for his transcendence and holiness. Is worship teaching? Is worship evangelism? Is worship singing? Or is worship all of this and more?

I have struggled to define worship in a way that is faithful to Scripture, and I have discovered that worship is not easy to define. Worship is a multifaceted action that can be described in many ways. Even the above descriptions are not completely wrong. Biblical worship does teach, it does evangelize, it does extol God. The problem with basing worship on just one of these definitions is that it limits worship. When worship is defined in terms of a single aspect, the worshiping community is locked into developing a worship style that focuses on that one truth. One church emphasizes preaching, another evangelism, and another praise. What we need is a definition of worship that, rather than limiting worship, is broad enough to include all aspects of worship.

What has helped me most is to recognize truncated definitions of worship frequently come out of the question, “What should worship accomplish?”—and that is the wrong question. As soon as that question is posed, worship planners think in terms of goals: worship should teach; worship should evangelize; worship should heal; worship should entertain;

worship should lift up God. Then, to accomplish the stated goal, planners order and organize worship around the goal. This goal-driven approach to worship is, I believe, ineffective because it does not operate out of the biblical vision of worship.

Since my own worship background was informed by this goal-driven worship, I have struggled for years to develop a comprehensive definition of worship. One day as I was meditating on the worship of Revelation 4 and 5, worship finally became more clear to me. What I saw in the vision of St. John was a worship focused on God and the work of redemption in Christ by the Spirit. I realized in a new way how God is praised and glorified as the work of his Son is told and enacted again and again. As I reflected on that Scripture, I saw that the biblical question is never “What does worship accomplish?” but “What does worship represent?” In brief, *worship re-presents the biblical God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—through the story of God’s work in the world: creating it, entering into it to redeem creatures and creation, and accomplishing his work at the end of history in the new heavens and the new earth.* But, guess what, when worship focuses on God and God’s redeeming work, everything we hope worship will accomplish gets accomplished—people’s lives are transformed, people grow in the knowledge of truth, people experience God’s healing power and people are filled with joy. So, the next time you evaluate worship, ask, “Did we do the old, old story?” and *then* ask, “What was accomplished?”

QUESTIONS:

1. Have you a working definition of worship? What is it?

2. How does it compare with the definition above?

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION:

*I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. —PSALM 9:1*