

Instructions about Worship

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SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 2:1-6; 3:14-16

KEY VERSE: **There is one God;**

**there is also one mediator between God and
humankind,
Christ Jesus.**

—1 Timothy 2:5

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

- to identify literary and theological elements in the texts of an ancient creed and a hymn;
 - to create a personal faith statement; and
 - to examine or write a hymn that tells the story of salvation.
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Introducing the Scripture

Both the Old and New Testaments are rich sources for the study of worship. The Bible introduces the early Hebrew and Greek vocabulary of worship as well as the theological themes, symbols, features, and acts of ancient worship.

The Old Testament incorporates many words that describe the actions of people who worshiped God. The word commonly translated “worship” means to bow down or prostrate oneself. Other words depicting worshipful actions include “rise up,” “stand,” “lift hands,” “ascend,” and “dance,” to name but a few. From these words, we learn that biblical worship is active worship that expresses submission to God and communicates joy in God’s presence.

The New Testament is similar to the Old in that the writers incorporated descriptive language that refers to acts or features of Hebrew worship. However, the early Christians had few opportunities to participate in the large-scale public worship events which formed the context for the Old Testament terminology. Much of the worship conducted by early Christians took place in small groups and was necessarily limited in size and scope. Nevertheless, in spite of these constraints, New Testament writers did a magnificent job of employing

the ancient words in ways which communicate effectively to us today.

Paul was one such writer. Worship in the early Church included times of personal and corporate prayer. Writing to Timothy, a pastoral leader, Paul shared his thoughts on prayer (**1 Timothy 2:1-6**). In his letter, Paul also incorporated the text from what is considered to be an early baptismal confession (**2:5-6**) and one of the Church’s earliest creedal statements set to music (**3:16**). It is with these texts that we begin this quarter’s study.

Examining the Scripture

Chapter two of 1 Timothy comprises the first part of a set of instructions on proper worship. The instructions are divided into two parts:

1. appeals and theological support for prayer (**2:1-7**); and
2. guidelines for appropriate conduct in worship (**2:8-15**).

Our study covers part of Paul’s instruction on prayer.

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4. Paul began his teaching on prayer with the words, “**First of all, then,**” (v. 1). It is not likely that he was suggesting that prayer is the most important activity during worship as some have suggested, but that he was simply moving forward as he recorded his thoughts.

Paul used four descriptors while calling attention to the importance of prayer in worship: “**supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving.**” Biblical scholars generally agree that Paul layered synonym upon synonym in order to add fullness and emphasis. In so doing, Paul accentuated the centrality of prayer in worship.

Paul went one step further, however, and urged that prayers of all kinds “**be made for everyone.**” It was common for Christians in the early Church to pray for public authorities (v. 2a). Historians note that even during

the days of dire persecution with Nero at the helm, the Church prayed for the emperor. Indeed, they considered it their duty to do so. Paul added another dimension to their discipline. He asked them to pray for everyone.

Having said this, Paul zeroed in on prayers for kings (emperors) and “**all who are in high positions**”—suggesting that the spiritual discipline of prayer yields both practical and spiritual benefits (v. 2b). What was the attitude of the Church to be toward the empire and its leaders? Paul’s advice: pray for them, because they, along with everyone else, could experience salvation (v. 3-4). The practice of inclusive prayer is in accord with God’s character as Savior of the world.

1 TIMOTHY 2:5-6. In these verses we see Paul invoking language from a liturgical source to delineate the basic tenets of the Christian faith:

- There is one God;
- Christ Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and humanity;
- Jesus gave his life to be the world’s Savior.

The five rhythmical clauses found in **verses 5-6** are thought to be part of a baptismal confession. If this is truly the case, Paul may have employed this well-known confession in order to undergird his directive to pray for everyone. This statement memorized by Christians when they first became believers depicts Christianity as universal. Salvation is for everyone; therefore, pray for all people.

The meaning of the cryptic phrase translated “**this was attested at the right time**” is somewhat unclear. A simple explanation would be that God’s timing is always right. It is helpful to note that the Greek language has two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* forms the root of our word “chronology” and refers to calendar or clock time. *Kairos*, the word used in **verse 6**, refers to quality of time. Paul’s word choice suggests that God was not watching a clock, but rather, God was watching a world and acted at the proper time.

As chapter two ends and chapter three begins, we find Paul underscoring the point of his opening paragraph by reasserting the purpose of his ministry (v. 7), giving instructions for proper conduct in worship (vv. 8-15), and offering a guide for spiritual leaders (3:1-13).

1 TIMOTHY 3:14-16. In these final verses of chapter three, Paul reiterated the purpose of his letter. **Verses 14-16** mark a change in content and shift in emphasis.

In effect, they form a bridge between the two major sections of the letter. Embedded in this bridge is a fragment of an early Christian hymn.

As far as we know, Paul was unable to realize his desire to visit with Timothy and the church at Ephesus face to face (v. 14). In fact, in the second letter to Timothy, Paul, who was then in a Roman prison, asks Timothy to come to him (2 Timothy 4:9).

Just in case he would be unable to travel to Ephesus, Paul summarized for Timothy the purpose of his first letter (v. 15). He wanted to make sure that the readers knew how Christians should conduct themselves. He used three phrases to describe the church:

1. “**household of God.**” “Household” as a metaphor for “family” was hinted at earlier in the chapter in vv. 4-5. It flows naturally from the recognitions of God as Father and believers as brothers and sisters. The Church must be a family.
2. “**pillar. . .of the truth.**” In Ephesus, the word “pillar” had special significance. Within the city was located the Temple of Diana or Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. An outstanding feature of that structure was its marble pillars, some of which were studded with precious stones and overlaid with gold. The people of Ephesus knew how beautiful a pillar could be. Likewise, the Church should be a beautiful display and demonstration of the truth.¹
3. “**bulwark of the truth.**” A bulwark or buttress is a structural support for a building. In a fragile, shaky world, the Church provides support by presenting the truth of the gospel.

The mystery of faith or religion was a topic Paul often addressed (e.g., **Romans 16:25-27**, **Colossians 1:25-29**, and **Ephesians 3:1-13**). In this case, the “**mystery of our religion**” refers to the mystery of God, whose secret was revealed in Jesus.

Paul then lifted six rhythmic lines from an early hymn to finish off his literary bridge between the first and second half of his letter. The poetry (v. 16) begins in mid-stanza with the pronoun “he” (other sources use “who” or “which”) for which there is no antecedent. However, this was a hymn to Christ that has the effect of a creed. It appears to consist of three couplets connected by the parallel language of the closing words in each. Most scholars view it as a *heilsgeschichtliche* hymn, one that tells the story of salvation. The hymn is a poetic expression of belief in Christ.

Applying the Scripture

Regardless of where we stand in the modern-day worship wars regarding music or drama or dance in the church's service of worship, we probably all agree that prayer is a basic component of a worship experience. So how are we to apply Paul's instructions?

Prayer is mysterious. Prayer reaches into a realm that escapes human understanding. How is it that God meets us in our innermost being when we pray? From Paul's instructions concerning prayer, we learn two things:

1. Christian prayer must have a larger scope than the selfish concerns of the one who offers the prayer. In other words, Christian prayer should include intercession or prayer on behalf of others.
2. In addition to being deeply personal, prayer is a corporate act of worship. Do we pray *along with* the one who leads in prayer during a worship service? How can we adjust our mental state to the point of making the leader's prayer our prayer as well? How can we effectively pray for "everyone"?

The basis for intercessory prayer lies in our belief in one God. We take our concerns for others to God because God is the God of all. "All" is a key word for Paul as he taught inclusiveness: prayer by *all*, prayer for *all*, prayer especially for *all* in authority, because God loves *all* people and has made provision for everyone's salvation.

At the center of this inclusive circle is the Christ, the Way to God. While all can be saved, there is only one Savior. This we believe. Humanity can experience unity because there is one God and one Mediator. Acts of worship are intended to be uniting influences in our churches because they are addressed to the God of all.

While historic creeds of the Church have their origins in the Bible, Baptists remain a non-creedal people. However, there were times in Baptist history when fundamentalists attempted to introduce a creed or uniform confession of faith. One example, the 1922 annual convention in Indianapolis, is described in *Journeys* (page 6). A similar proposal to adopt a creed was introduced at a national convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1946. The Northern Baptist Convention rejected this proposal, too, "preferring to subscribe only to the New Testament as the norm of faith and practice."²

Nevertheless, Baptists can learn from creeds. Just as Paul referred to two ancient liturgical sources (the baptismal confession in **2:5-6** and the hymn based on a creed in **3:16**), we can benefit by looking to similar sources to enhance our worship.

Session Plans

These lesson plans are given as suggestions. The words **AND**, **OR**, or **AND/OR** between activities indicate alternate activities. Choose activities best suited for your particular group and time schedule. Feel free to adapt the suggestions to meet the needs and interests of your group.

GETTING READY FOR THE SESSION

- As you prepare to teach this lesson, **pray** for each person in the class. In addition, **review** a creed or affirmation of faith and reflect on the meaning it has for you. **Consider** writing one of your own. (An Internet search for creeds or confessions of faith will yield some examples.)
- **Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6** and **3:14-16** and today's session in this leader's guide and *Journeys*.
- **Prepare** to share information from "Examining the Scripture" in your own words.
- **Choose** a familiar affirmation or statement of faith from your church's hymnal or another source for use in "Examine a faith statement." **Make** copies for everyone, or **have** hymnals available for participants to use.
- **Select** a hymn of faith to study in "Examine hymns of faith." (See suggested hymns in the activity plan that follows.) **Have** hymnals or legal copies of the lyrics available. If you intend to sing the hymn during the session, **notify** your musician(s) during the week.
- **Have available** Bibles, paper, pens or pencils, chalkboard and chalk, or whiteboard or newsprint and markers.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

(5-10 MINUTES)

This I Believe

- **Explain** that *This I Believe* is a national media project that engages people in writing, sharing, and discussing their core values and beliefs. People can read many individuals' essays online at www.thisibelieve.org or hear them read on National Public Radio.
- **Invite** participants to listen as you read some interesting "I believe. . ." statements that have appeared on the "This I Believe" website:³
 - "I believe in sticking my nose into other people's business."
 - "I believe that people are scared."
 - "I believe that play can heal."
 - "I believe in the power to forget."

- “I believe that what my father told me as a child is ultimately true: “There’s nothing new under the sun. All matter just changes form.”
- “I believe in the dwindling generation that some people call our greatest and others simply call old people.”
- “I believe in the human soul and its ability to connect with others.”
- **Ask:** What’s missing here? (Responses are likely to fall in the area of spirituality and in particular, “I believe in God.” If you wish, you might also explain that Christian faith statements may be found on the website. The above statements were chosen from among many in order to elicit a spiritual response.)
- **Say:** Today’s session focuses on what we believe and how we practice what we believe during worship. Let’s begin by practicing one of our basic beliefs—prayer.
- **Lead** the group in an inclusive prayer.

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

(35-40 MINUTES)

Introduce the Theme of Worship (5 min.)

- In your own words, **present** background information from “Introducing the Scripture.”

AND

Pray for Everyone (10-15 min.)

- **Read** (or **ask** someone to read) **1 Timothy 2:1-4**, printed on page 5 of *Journeys*.
- **Invite** everyone to turn to page 7 in *Journeys* and **read verses 5-6** in unison.
- **Discuss** the following questions:
 - What was Paul’s main point in these verses? (*Pray for everyone.*)
 - What were his supporting points? (*It’s the right thing to do; God desires everyone to experience salvation; there is one God.*)
 - Who does “everyone” specifically include according to this passage? (*Kings or emperors and people in authority.*)
 - Why might praying for the emperor have presented a challenge to the early Christians? (*The emperor led the persecution against them.*)
 - What did Paul say would be the results of praying for kings and those in high positions? (*A quiet peaceful life lived in godliness and dignity and salvation for those who believe in God.*)

- How faithful are we (in this local church) in praying for our national leaders? Could we do more? Be specific.
- **Organize** a time of prayer for national leaders. (You may wish to make a list of leaders as participants suggest names.) If the class is large, subdivide into smaller groups to pray.

AND

Examine a Faith Statement (15-20 min.)

- **Ask** participants to read **1 Timothy 2:5-6** again in unison (page 7 in *Journeys*).
- In your own words, **share** background information related to these verses from “Examining the Scripture.”
- **Invite** participants to help you paraphrase the biblical confession of faith ending with the word “all.” **Remind** them that to paraphrase is to restate the text in different words while retaining the meaning. **Encourage** participants to use common, everyday words to communicate their beliefs. **Record** the suggestions and comments from participants on the board or newsprint, and **lead** them through the process of producing one statement to which all can agree by consensus.
- **Distribute** copies of the affirmation or statement of faith which you have chosen to use.
- **Have** participants read the affirmation or statement of faith aloud in unison or responsively if so indicated in the text.
- Section by section (or as appropriate to the format) **discuss** the meaning of the affirmation or statement of faith.
- **Discuss** the following questions:
 - What would you like to add to this statement?
 - Is there anything that you think could be left out?
 - How does a statement like this help us communicate our faith to others?

AND/OR

Write a Faith Statement (15-20 min.)

- If you didn’t do the previous exercise, **begin** by reading **1 Timothy 2:5-6** again in unison (page 7 in *Journeys*), and sharing background information related to these verses from “Examining the Scripture.”
- **Distribute** paper and pens or pencils to everyone. **Invite** participants to put some of their spiritual “I believe. . .” statements on paper. **Encourage** them to use

any format they wish; the point is to have participants express their faith.

- If time permits and if several participants are willing, **invite** volunteers to read some of their statements.

OR

Write a Corporate Faith Statement (25 min.)

- **Ask** participants to read **1 Timothy 2:5-6** again in unison (page 7 in *Journeys*).
- In your own words, **share** background information related to these verses from “Examining the Scripture.”
- **Divide** the class into groups of about six.
- **Distribute** a sheet of paper or newsprint along with a pencil or marker to each group. **Instruct** each group to choose a recorder.
- **Ask** each group to write an affirmation of faith that might be used in a worship setting. **Encourage** participants to use common everyday language.
- **Reconvene** the large group. **Invite** from the spokespersons from the small groups to share the results of their work together.
- If appropriate, **make plans** to submit the best finished product(s) to the pastor or worship committee for consideration.

AND

Examine Hymns of Faith (15 min.)

- **Ask** someone to read **1 Timothy 3:14-16** (page 8 in *Journeys*).
- In your own words, **share** background information related to these verses from “Examining the Scripture.”
- **Invite** participants to name the facts about Jesus that appear in the hymn. **Record** responses on the board or newsprint.
- **Distribute** hymnals (if you haven’t already done so). **Announce** the page number of the hymn you have chosen. Hymns that tell the story of salvation (*heilsge-schichtliche* hymns) include these two well-known hymns: “Tell Me the Story of Jesus” with lyrics by Fanny Crosby and “One Day” with lyrics by Wilbur Chapman. Check the hymnal’s table of contents for additional choices (key words: Life and Ministry of Jesus).

- **Sing** or **read** the lyrics of the hymn.
- **Invite** participants to name the facts about Jesus that appear in the hymn. **Record** responses on the board or newsprint.
- **Compare** the facts in the two lists.

OR

Compose a Hymn (25 min.)

- **Ask** someone to read **1 Timothy 3:14-16** (page 8 in *Journeys*).
- In your own words, **share** background information related to these verses from “Examining the Scripture.”
- **Divide** participants into two groups according to their choice. One group will compose a tune to be used with the words to the ancient hymn (v. 16). The other group will use the ideas in the ancient hymn to write new words to a familiar tune of their choice.
- As time permits, **invite** the group participants to share the results of their work with the rest of the class.

OR

Put Beliefs into Practice (35-40 min.)

- Incorporating ideas from the above suggestions in “Developing the Session,” **create** three interest centers: prayer, writing, and music. **Provide** supplies and written instructions for each center.
- **Invite** participants to select their center of interest.

CLOSING THE SESSION

(5-10 MINUTES)

- **Ask:** What did you learn today about worship in the early Christian Church? Which of these worship elements would you like to see (re)introduced into our services of worship in our church?
- **Close** the session by singing a hymn or reading a statement of faith written by participants during the hour.

NOTES

1. William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) 89.
2. Robert Torbet, *A History of the Baptists, third edition* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1991), 436.
3. This I Believe, www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_Top25EssaysTW.php, accessed February 23, 2008.