

Worship *the* Creator



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Ps. 115:1–8, Deut. 10:17–22, Ps. 101:1, Isa. 1:10–17, Isaiah 58, Mark 12:38–40.

Memory Text: “ ‘Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?’ ” (Isaiah 58:6, 7, NKJV).

Even a quick reading of the Old Testament prophets alerts us to their concerns about the mistreatment of the poor and oppressed. The prophets and the God for whom they spoke were outraged about what they saw being done in all the surrounding nations (*see, for example, Amos 1 and 2*). But they also had a particular sense of anger and grief at the acts of iniquity done by God's people themselves, those who had been the recipients of so many divine blessings. Given their history, as well as their God-given laws, these people should have known better. Unfortunately, that wasn't always the case, and prophets had a lot to say about this sad state of events.

It is interesting to discover, too, that many of the best-known statements concerning justice and injustice from the Old Testament prophets are actually given in the context of instructions about worship. As we will see, true worship is not just something that happens during a religious ritual. True worship also is about living a life that shares God's concerns for the well-being of others and that seeks to lift up those who have been downtrodden and forgotten.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 10.

Idolatry and Oppression

Soon after God led the people of Israel out of Egypt, He met with them at Mount Sinai, giving them the Ten Commandments in written form, including the first two commandments about not worshipping other gods and not making idols (*see Exod. 20:2–6*). In response, the people promised to do everything they had been commanded and to live as His people (*see Exod. 24:1–13*).

But then Moses was gone up the mountain and stayed there for almost six weeks and the people began to wonder what had become of him. Under pressure from the mob, Aaron made a golden calf and led the people in making sacrifices before it, after which “they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry” (*Exod. 32:6, NIV*). Both the Lord and Moses were outraged at how quickly the people had turned away from God to idol worship—and it seemed that it was only Moses’ intercession that saved Israel from its deserved punishment (*see Exod. 32:30–34*).

Idolatry, however, was a temptation God’s people fell into way too often. The history of the kings of Israel and Judah is punctuated by periods of idolatry, which include the outrageous acts some of the kings led their people to commit in the worship of these gods. Such unfaithfulness was a recurring focus of the prophets God sent in order to call the people back to Him. Often, too, amid the calls for revival and reformation were calls for better treatment of the poor, the needy, and the helpless among them.

Read Psalm 115:1–8. What crucial point is the author making there?

It is a human tendency that we become like the thing or person we worship and focus on. So, it was only natural that concern for others and for justice would diminish when God’s people turned from worshipping a God of justice to worshipping the false gods of the surrounding nations, who were often styled as beings of war or fertility. When they chose other gods, the people changed their attitude in a lot of things, including how they treated others. Had they been faithful to the Lord, they would have shared His concern for those in need among them.

Dwell more on this idea of becoming like what we worship. How do we see contemporary manifestations of this principle?

A Reason to Worship

Throughout the Bible, God's people are urged to worship God, but we also are repeatedly offered reasons for doing so. We are told to worship Him because of who He is, what He has done, and because of His many attributes. Among these are His goodness, justice, and mercy. When we are reminded of what God is like, what He has done for us (especially in the cross of Christ), and what He promises to do, none of us should ever be without reason to worship and praise God.

Read Deuteronomy 10:17–22, Psalm 101:1, 146:5–10, Isaiah 5:16, and 61:11. What are the motivations for worship and praising God given in these verses?

Such reasons for worship were not new to God's people. Some of the most enthusiastic times of worship of the newly freed Israelites happened in response to the obvious intervention of God on their behalf. For example, after being brought out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea, Moses and Miriam led the people in singing praise to God for what they had just seen and been rescued from (*see Exodus 15*).

God's justice and mercy, as revealed in such events, were not to be forgotten. As the people kept these stories alive by retelling them regularly, the acts and justice of God continued to be an inspiration for their worship years later and in following generations. One example of this retelling and worship is recorded in Deuteronomy 10:17–22.

God's justice is, first, simply part of who He is, a core component of His essential character. "It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice" (*Job 34:12, NIV*). God is just and is concerned with justice—and that is a reason to worship and praise Him.

Second, God's justice is seen in His just and righteous acts on behalf of His people and on behalf of all who are poor and oppressed. His justice is never merely a description of His character. Rather, the Bible portrays a God who "heard the cry of the needy" (*Job 34:28, NIV*) and is active and anxious to right the wrongs that are so obvious in our world. Ultimately, this will be fully realized in God's final judgment and His re-creation of the world.

If ancient Israel had reason to praise the Lord, how much more so do we, after the Cross, have reasons to praise Him?

Religious Oppressors

During the better times of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the people would return to the temple and the worship of God, although even then, their worship was often mixed with inroads from idolatry and the religions of the surrounding nations. But according to the prophets, even their best attempts at religion were not enough to turn them from the evils perpetrated in the land in their daily lives. And no matter how hard they worked at being religious through their rituals of worship, the music of their hymns could not drown out the cries of the poor and oppressed.

Amos described the people of his day as those who “trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land” (*Amos 8:4, NIV*). He saw their desire to get done with their rituals so they could reopen the market and get back to their dishonest trade, that of “buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals” (*Amos 8:6, NIV*).

Read Isaiah 1:10–17, Amos 5:21–24, and Micah 6:6–8. What was the Lord telling these religious people about their rituals?

Through His prophets, God uses strong language to ridicule religion and worship that is disconnected from and in contrast with the suffering and oppression of those around them. In Amos 5:21–24 (*NIV*), we read of God saying that He “hates,” “despises,” and is generally disgusted by their worship. Their gatherings are described as a “stench,” and their offerings and music are dismissed as less than worthless.

In Micah 6, we see a series of increasingly inflated, even mocking, suggestions as to how they can most appropriately worship God. The prophet mockingly offers the suggestion of burnt offerings, then increases the offering to “thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil” (*Mic. 6:7, NIV*) before going to the horrific—but not unknown—extreme of suggesting sacrificing his firstborn child to gain God’s favor and forgiveness.

In the end, though, what the Lord truly wanted for them was to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [their] God” (*Mic. 6:8, NIV*).

Have you ever found yourself guilty of being more concerned about religious forms and rituals than about helping those in need right around you? What did you learn from that experience?

A Way to Worship

In their explanation of the relationship between worship and justice, there is another step urged by the prophets: that an active concern for relieving the poor and oppressed and helping those in need *is* an important part of worship itself. Isaiah 58 is one chapter that makes this link obvious.

Read Isaiah 58. What has gone wrong in the relationship between God and His people as described in the early part of this chapter?

As we have seen previously, this criticism is addressed to people who are actively religious. They seem to be earnestly seeking God, but apparently it is not working. So, God says they should try changing how they worship, to try a different way of serving God. If He were to choose how they would worship, it would be “to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke” (*Isa. 58:6, NIV*). They also would feed the hungry, give shelter to the homeless, and help those in need.

Such activities are not presented as the only way to worship, but God does urge them as a way to worship—and a form of worship that might be preferable to some of the people’s more traditional worship practices. As such, worship is not only inwardly focused but something that brings blessing to all those around the worshipers of God. “The true purpose of religion is to release men from their burdens of sin, to eliminate intolerance and oppression, and to promote justice, liberty, and peace.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 306.

In Isaiah 58:8–12, God promises blessings in response to this form of worship. In effect, God is saying that if the people were to be less focused on themselves, they would find God working with them and through them to bring healing and restoration.

Interestingly, this chapter also connects this kind of worship with a renewal of “delight”-filled Sabbath keeping. We have already considered some of the strong connections between Sabbath and ministry, but these verses include both these activities in this call for the people to revitalize their worship and to discover God’s blessing. Reflecting on these verses, Ellen G. White commented, “Upon those who keep the Sabbath of the Lord is laid the responsibility of doing a work of mercy and benevolence.”—*Welfare Ministry*, p. 121.

Mercy and Faithfulness

When Jesus was confronted by some of the religious leaders of His day who criticized Him for eating with “sinners,” He quoted the prophet Hosea, telling them to go back to their books and discover what God really meant when He said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (*Matt. 9:13, NIV, quoting Hos. 6:6*).

As we will see, Jesus lived a life of caring and service. His interactions with others, His healing miracles, and many of His parables demonstrated and urged that a life lived in such a way was the best way to express true devotion to God. The religious leaders were His greatest critics but also were the target of His harshest criticism. Like the religious people of Isaiah’s day, they believed that they ensured their special relationship with God because of their religious practices, while at the same time they were exploiting the poor and ignoring the needy. Their worship was out of step with their actions, and Jesus was not reserved in His condemnation of such hypocrisy.

Read Mark 12:38–40. Does Jesus’ comment that they “devour widows’ houses” seem out of place in this list, or is that the point Jesus is trying to make? How would you explain why “these shall receive greater damnation”?

Perhaps Jesus’ most frightening sermon—particularly for religious people—is that found in Matthew 23. Not only did Jesus describe their religion as not helping people who are disadvantaged in life, He considered such religion as adding to their burdens. By their actions or at times their lack of action and caring, Jesus said, they “ ‘shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces’ ” (*Matt. 23:13, NIV*).

But echoing the prophets of centuries earlier, Jesus also directly addressed the gap between their serious religious practices and the injustices they condoned and profited from. “ ‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness’ ” (*Matt. 23:23, NIV*). Jesus was quick to add that the religious practices and observances are not wrong in themselves, but they should not take the place of treating others fairly.

How can we avoid the trap of thinking that having and knowing the truth is enough?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Isaiah 58—A Divine Prescription,” pp. 29–34, in *Welfare Ministry*; “Woes on the Pharisees,” pp. 610–620, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In urging the value of practical godliness, the prophet was only repeating the counsel given Israel centuries before. . . . From age to age these counsels were repeated by the servants of Jehovah to those who were in danger of falling into habits of formalism and of forgetting to show mercy.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 326, 327.

“I have been instructed to refer our people to the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah. Read this chapter carefully and understand the kind of ministry that will bring life into the churches. The work of the gospel is to be carried by means of our liberality as well as by our labors. When you meet suffering souls who need help, give it to them. When you find those who are hungry, feed them. In doing this you will be working in lines of Christ’s ministry. The Master’s holy work was a benevolent work. Let our people everywhere be encouraged to have a part in it.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 29.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Have you ever thought about doing justice and loving mercy as acts of worship? How might this change your approach to caring for others? How might this change your approach to worship?
- ❷ How can we guard against neglecting the “more important matters of the law” (*Matt. 23:23, NIV*) in our Christian lives, both individually and as a church community? Can you recognize some examples in your own experience where you might have strained out a gnat but swallowed a camel (*see Matt. 23:24, NIV*)?
- ❸ Why is hypocrisy considered such a sin? Isn’t it better at least to try to look like we are doing good?
- ❹ How does God’s vision and passion for the poor and needy, as expressed through the prophets, change how you view the world? How might you read or hear your local news reports in a different way if you saw and heard with the eyes and ears of a prophet?

Summary: While the prophets were concerned about evil in the land, they were particularly focused on the evil committed by people who claimed and worshiped God as their own. For the prophets and for Jesus, worship is inconsistent with injustice, and such religion is hypocrisy. The real worship that God seeks includes working against oppression and caring for the poor and needy.

Dreams of Jesus

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Susumu Kanai had his first vision of Jesus as he lay in bed at 5:00 A.M. in Osaka, Japan. He had spent some time contemplating life every morning for 12 years in his hometown of 2.6 million people, located 310 miles (500 kilometers) southwest of Tokyo. But this time, he was startled to see a bright light. In the light, he saw a back-lit figure with outstretched arms.

Curious to know more, Susumu searched online and found a photo of the giant *Christ the Redeemer* statue with outstretched arms in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He concluded that perhaps he had seen Jesus.

A short time later, Susumu had a nighttime dream in which he was seated across from a Man at a table. The Man had His hands on the table and was surrounded by a bright rainbow. When he visited a barbershop several days later, Susumu realized that the Man in the dream was Jesus. Leafing through a book of famous paintings as he waited for a haircut, he saw Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and recognized Jesus from the dream. The dreams and visions continued. Susumu had a dream that he and seven other men had been captured in a foreign country. He watched as the seven men were killed one by one. When his turn came to die, someone grabbed him from behind and whispered, "I'm of the Coptic religion. Come with me."

Susumu woke at that moment. He looked up "Coptic" online and was astonished to find a Coptic church located only 35 miles (55 kilometers) away. For the first time he wondered whether he should go to church.

A few mornings later, Susumu had another vision. He saw the words "Gospel of Matthew" run across his mind's eye from left to right, like a digital advertisement. He didn't know what the words meant; so, he looked online and learned that Matthew was a book of the Bible. He immediately downloaded an audio version of Matthew and started listening in his car.

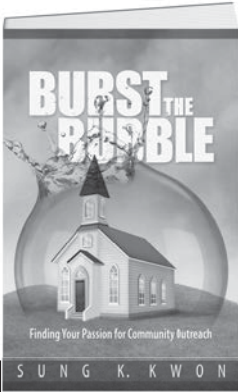
At the same time, he asked his landlady, whom he knew was a Christian, where she worshiped. She brought him to the Osaka Center Seventh-day Adventist Church.



Susumu, pictured left, is among dozens of unsolicited guests who showed up at unprecedented evangelistic meetings at 161 sites across Japan in 2018. Church leaders have never seen anything like it in a country where Christians account for only 0.7 percent of the population. "The Holy Spirit is doing something extraordinary in Japan, bringing people to the church and convicting them," said Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson, who met Susumu. "We need to pray for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit so countries like Japan and many others become completely inundated with the Advent message."



Jesus went to the places where the people were.



It's not enough to stay inside the walls of a church and shout at the community, "Come and see!" Come and see what? We need to take Christ's love to the places where people are—at the mall, supermarkets, laundromats, schools, places of work, restaurants, coffee shops, and so forth. People are not coming to us; we have to go to them!

Are you ready to transform your world?

ISBN 978-0-8163-6341-4

For eBooks, go to:
Adventist-eBooks.com

 Pacific Press®
© 2019 Pacific Press®
Publishing Association
Please contact your ABC
for pricing in Canada.
1855902817

Three ways to order:

1 Local	Adventist Book Center®
2 Call	1-800-765-6955
3 Shop	AdventistBookCenter.com



AdventistBookCenter.com



[AdventistBookCenter](http://AdventistBookCenter.com)



[@AdventistBooks](https://twitter.com/AdventistBooks)



[AdventistBooks](http://AdventistBooks.com)



TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT TIME

What is Total Member Involvement?

- ▶ Total Member Involvement (TMI) is a full-scale, world-church evangelistic thrust that involves every member, every church, every administrative entity, every type of public outreach ministry, as well as personal and institutional outreach.
- ▶ It is a calendar-driven, intentional soul-winning plan that discovers the needs of families, friends, and neighbors. Then it shares how God fulfills every need, resulting in church planting and church growth, with a focus on retaining, preaching, sharing, and discipling.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT TMI TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL

Dedicate the first 15 minutes of each lesson to plan, pray and share:*

- ▶ **TMI IN-REACH:** Plan to visit, pray, care for missing or hurting members, and distribute territory assignments. Pray and discuss ways to minister to the needs of church families, inactive members, youth, women and men, and various ways to get the church family involved.
- ▶ **TMI OUT-REACH:** Pray and discuss ways of reaching your community, city, and world, fulfilling the Gospel Commission by sowing, reaping, and keeping. Involve all ministries in the church as you plan short-term and long-term soul-winning projects. TMI is about intentional acts of kindness. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved: 1. Develop the habit of finding needs in your community. 2. Make plans to address those needs. 3. Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ **TMI UP-REACH:** Lesson Study. Encourage members to engage in individual Bible study—make study of the Bible in Sabbath School participatory. Study for transformation, not information.

TMI	Time	Explanation
Fellowship Outreach World Mission	15 min.*	Pray, plan, organize for action. Care for missing members. Schedule outreach.
Lesson Study	45 min.*	Involve everyone in the study of the lesson. Ask questions. Highlight key texts.
Lunch		Plan lunch for the class after worship. THEN GO OUT AND REACH SOMEONE!

**Adjust times as necessary.*