

# Simple Sundays

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**What Is  
Worship?**



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### Main Idea

Worship is at the heart of the Christian faith. If we are to truly understand worship, we must begin with a look at whom we are called to worship and who or what are the idols that replace God at the center of our lives.

### You Will Need

Bibles; newsprint, markers

### Faith Statement

We trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

## Background

Presbyterians affirm the absolute centrality of God in our worship. Any study of worship begins with a look at the God we worship. Mark and Exodus help us with this study in two ways. First, Mark records for us Jesus' teaching on the "greatest commandment," showing three objects of love—God, neighbor, and self—with God being the priority. Jesus says that loving God needs a singleness of purpose and a commitment of all that is in us: heart, soul, strength, and mind. One of the most concrete ways we can use our whole self in expressing our love for God is through worship.

As you examine the passages in Mark and Exodus within the context of worship, challenge them to explore what it means to worship God with your whole selves, engaging body, mind, and spirit in the act of worship. The Ten Commandments, as Exodus records them, recall God's action on behalf of the people of Israel, emphasizing the power and holiness of the one true God. The first two commandments highlight the most basic demand God makes of the people: worship no other gods, idols, or images, even if those images are intended to represent the one true God. The act of worship is unconditionally and exclusively reserved for God alone. We see this same exclusivity of worship expressed in Jesus' words about what command is greatest.

The Mark passage offers the opportunity to explore what it means to worship God with all of ourselves, while the Exodus passage invites reflection on how to address two different aspects of idolatry: prohibiting the worship of other gods and rejecting the making of idols or images. Both practices were quite common among other people during the time of the early Israelites who first received these commandments.

At the time, the Jewish tradition was virtually unique in rejecting both the worship of other gods and particularly the making of graven images or idols that served to represent whatever god was being worshiped.

On the surface, idolatry, as the early Israelites understood it, may seem like a nonissue in our current society where monotheism is widely accepted—and even more so in the Reformed tradition, where we shy away from the use of physical images to represent God. It is precisely because we think ourselves innocent, however, that we need to take inventory of the forms idolatry may assume in our lives. And, when we expand idolatry, as the New Testament does, to include giving priority to other interests besides God, it is indeed a significant issue for young adults living in an increasingly secular society.

## You and Your Youth

This session invites youth to worship the one true God wholly and completely, to the exclusion of all other gods. In our attempts to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, we all fall short in some ways, giving priority to other, less important matters in our lives. In preparation for this class, take time to reflect on the importance of worship in your life and how the practice of worship has helped you to keep God as a focus in your life. Pray for the youth in your class by name, that they might keep God at the center of their hearts, minds, and actions.

 **Enter**

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

**The Sights and Sounds of Worship**

Invite participants to close their eyes and picture themselves sitting in worship on a typical Sunday. Ask the following questions, allowing time for reflection after each one:

- What are the typical sights seen from where you are seated in the sanctuary?
- What sounds do you hear throughout the course of a worship service?
- What do you touch and feel?
- What do you think about during worship?
- What emotions do you feel? Does your mood change from the time you enter worship to the time when you leave?

Now ask the questions again. This time everyone can open their eyes and answer aloud. Ask the group to recall what they thought and felt as they were visualizing themselves in worship.

- What senses does worship primarily engage?
- How might worship engage the senses that are not typically engaged?
- In what ways does your experience of worship affect your understanding of God?

**Opening Prayer**

God, be among us as we gather to worship you and study your Word. Help us to pay attention to your presence in our lives. Teach us what it means to keep you at the center of our hearts always. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

 **Explore****Study the Bible**

Bibles

Introduce the study of Mark 12 and Exodus 20 in this way:

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give an account of Jesus' answer to the question, "What is the greatest commandment?" All three accounts record the same words—words consistent with the opening

lines of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses. Central to Moses' and to Jesus' teaching of the Law is the command to worship God alone and to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Obedience to this commandment calls us to place worship at the center of our lives.

Read Mark 12:28–30 aloud. Form teams. Assign each team one or more of the following: heart, soul, strength, or mind. Each team will answer the questions below and then gather together to share responses with the whole class.

- What does it mean to love God with all your (*substitute the word your team is studying*)?
- What might a worship service look like that was specifically designed to engage your \_\_\_\_\_?

Read Exodus 20:1–6 aloud. Write the word "idolatry" on a sheet of newsprint and ask the group to define the word to the best of their understanding. Then share with them the understanding of the two aspects of idolatry that are explained in the Background.

Discuss:

- What do you think it means to say that God is a jealous God?
- Why do you think it was important to God that the people not make idols even if the images stand for God?
- What are some of the physical objects that stand for God to us? (*cross, Bible, baptismal font, etc.*)
- Under what circumstances might any of these objects be considered an idol?

 **Express**

*These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.*

**Youth Issue**

Set up the following scenario and then discuss it using the questions below:

Rachel and Kathy have been friends since grade school. They attend the same church, and they both play in the school band. This year they are applying to colleges and plan to do further studies in music. Earlier this week, their band director announced the dates for summer band camp, and Rachel and Kathy were disappointed to hear that the youth group's mission trip is the same week. Rachel decides that band camp

is just too important to miss and chooses not to go on the mission trip. Kathy decides that it is wrong to put an extracurricular school commitment before a church commitment, and so she decides to attend the mission trip even though she must miss the first three days of band camp. She knows her grade and place in the band might suffer for it.

Discuss:

- Does Rachel’s decision mean that being in the band is more important to her than God?
- How can Rachel know if her decision is idolatrous?
- Under what circumstances does making school or extracurricular activities a higher priority than church activities become a form of idolatry?
- What are some practical ways that help you to keep God central in your life even if your participation in other groups or activities takes time away from church activities?

### Action Steps

In column 1, list several physical objects that are significant to your life. In column 2, list some major priorities in your life based on the activities that take up most of your time, energy, and commitment. Look at both lists considering what you know about worship and idolatry. Circle any items on your list that tend to distract you from your worship of God. Put an asterisk beside the items that encourage or support your faith. Consider changes you would be willing to make to eliminate any distractions from your worship of God. Share your responses with one another.

Physical Objectives	Major Priorities

### Praying for Others

*Newsprint, markers*

The focus of today’s intercession is on the world.

This prayer may include—but is not limited to—intercessions for the following concerns: creation and creatures, countries struggling with war or natural disaster, and people of other cultures. Think about concerns for the world you wish to share with God today and how you wish to make intercession with God about those concerns.

If it is a prayer for a country at war, you might pray for peace; if it is a prayer about an endangered species, pray for their survival, and so forth.

Take turns writing your individual one-sentence prayers on a sheet of newsprint so that everyone can see. As a group, write opening and closing sentences or a phrase that helps tie the individual concerns together.



**Exit**

### Closing Prayer

Read the intercessory prayer you wrote in the last section, reading the opening and closing sentences in unison and taking turns reading your individual prayers aloud.