

Leader Guide for Study 1: Call to Worship

Introduction:

A few of us may have had the experience of living down the street from some historic and beautiful church. Those among us who had this experience share a common memory: the sound of those enormous bells. When a Sunday service would begin those brass giants would swing back and forth to let every person within a few miles' radius know that it was time to come and worship. While one could easily imagine how this could quickly become a nuisance, it also carries a strange sort of beauty: Imagine the scene where everyone leaves their homes together and walks in fellowship into the local church for Sunday Worship. This type of town-wide Sunday alarm clock has fallen almost completely out of fashion, but the idea behind both the church bell and the dinner bell is the focus of our study today: The Call to Worship.

The Call to Worship is the first element of our worship service. It involves an elder, staff member, or church member standing before the congregation and reading an excerpt from the book of Psalms which is supposed to, well, call the people to worship. After this, a song of praise is played while the service begins to fill up, people begin to greet each other, and everyone's voices begin to join together in praise. While it might seem like a simple or small part of the Sunday worship service, it is important that we grasp the gravity of the Call to Worship. If we don't understand the weight of what it means that God is calling us to worship Him, we're surely going to misunderstand the weight of the rest of the worship service.

Part 1: What Does it Mean?

We're going to begin our study today by defining the terms "Call" and "Worship." Biblically speaking, the word "Call" can actually be quite complicated! However, for the purpose of understanding what the Call to Worship is, the word "call" is actually quite simple. The analogies used at the beginning of our study today do the concept justice. Each Sunday morning we are reminded that our God is inviting us to come together. This weekly call points beyond itself to our eternal calling as adopted sons and daughters of God! Being once called to faith, repentance, and eternal life we live our lives continually accepting God's call for

us to order our lives after His Word, with our call to worship being just one way we follow Jesus.

Question: What do you think it means to be “called”? What image or idea comes to mind?

The second term, “Worship”, is a little more complicated. At its very smallest, the word “worship” is the title given to the broadest genre of Christian praise music. But it’s much bigger than that. Some adjacent words could be “praise” or “honor.” It’s much bigger than these terms too. While worship certainly involves praise and honor, it isn’t *only* those things. The Westminster Shorter Catechism gives us a perfect definition in its first question:

Quest. 1. What is the chief end of man?

Ans. 1. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Worship is the chief end of human beings. Worship is the act of recognizing the fundamental reality of who we are as people before an eternal God. It rightly recognizes God as the Creator and ourselves as His creation. Singing, praying, and praising Him are just a few ways that we perform the task of worshipping God.

Let’s bring both of these words together. Our Call to Worship is an invitation for all to come and praise God. But it ought to resonate within us deeply as we accept this call that we are recognizing God as God and ourselves as His creation. It exalts the Lord, and humbles us. Is there any other place that church could possibly begin besides putting ourselves low and God high? Nothing can remind us of this better than Scripture. Before we move on to discussion, let’s read and meditate on a portion of Psalm 95, which is an often used text for a Call to Worship:

Read Psalm 95:1-5

[1] Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
[2] Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
[3] For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.

[4] In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
[5] The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

Discussion:

1. What do the words “Call” and “Worship” mean? Think as a group about what else these words might mean biblically.
2. What does a Call to Worship *do*? What “tone” does it set for the service?
3. Looking at Psalm 95, how does this Psalm relate to what we have said about the words “Call” and “Worship”?

Part 2: Why Do We Practice It?

Having an understanding of *what* the Call to Worship is, we can begin to ask *why* we do it each week. Here the simple answer: God tells us to worship Him. While that’s certainly enough reason to worship, God provides us with more information.

Let’s go back to our definition of worship: the chief end of man. With this definition we could say that all of the Christian life is worship, and we would certainly be right! (1 Cor. 10:31) But the Call to Worship does more than call us to do what we are already doing individually; It calls us to worship *together*. This aspect of the call to worship will be the focus of this section: Why do we worship together?

Question: Why do you think we worship together as a community?

When we worship individually, we recognize that we are creatures and God is the Creator. We recognize that we are humans and He is the Lord God. When we worship together, we recognize both of these things, but we also recognize that we stand next to other creatures as we worship God. We recognize that there is a community around us that is based on this weekly humbling of ourselves before the Lord. We are not alone in our Christian life.

So why does God have us come together to worship? He asks us to do this because we, as the church, are the bride of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for the church, that he might make her clean by his blood. (Eph. 5:26) Each of us sinners is called to come together and worship a holy, eternal God because Christ has redeemed His bride to be one with Him. We participate in worship

together because it is what we have been redeemed into as the Church. The adoration of Christ is the joy of being the Church just as the adoration of a husband is the joy of his wife. The chief end of the individual is to worship God and the chief end of the Church is to worship God.

Discussion:

1. How is worshipping individually different than worshipping together?
2. Have a member of the small group read this excerpt from Colossians:

Colossians 3:15–17 [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

3. How does this help us understand what our worship should look like? Does it help us understand why we gather together to worship?

Part 3: How Do We Practice It

Knowing *what* the Call to Worship is and *why* we do it together each week, let's finish today's study with the simplest aspect of the Call to Worship: *how* we do it. Let's start with a reading from Psalm 100:

Read Psalm 100

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

A Psalm for giving thanks.

[1] Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!

[2] Serve the LORD with gladness!

 Come into his presence with singing!

[3] Know that the LORD, he is God!

 It is he who made us, and we are his;

 we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

[4] Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

 and his courts with praise!

 Give thanks to him; bless his name!

[5] For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

This is what the Call to Worship looks like. The Pastor, a member, or an elder will open the Bible and read an excerpt that ought to lead the congregation to worship. The Scripture chosen is usually from the Psalms. Psalm 100, written out above, is a great example. It involves an invitation to praise (v. 1,2, 4), an adoration of God's goodness (v. 3, 5), and combines those two elements to lead us into worship that humbles us and exalts the Lord. After the Scripture is read, we enter into song together. This is meant to exhibit the attitude of what we just heard by lifting up the Lord's name in praise with one voice, recognizing Him as Lord. As we stand together and sing, we are accepting this invitation to bow down before the Lord. After this song, we have been called to worship, and we begin the rest of the service.

Discussion:

1. How do you think you might view or participate in the call to worship differently after today's study?
2. How can we better perform the call to worship as listeners?

Conclusion:

Our Call to Worship is like those loud, clanging bells we thought about in the beginning of our study today. It's an invitation for all to come and bow down before God, lifting up His holy name. How should we respond to what we have learned today? On some level, perhaps we can be more thoughtful of our entire approach to church. With a deeper understanding of what community worship is, we can begin to see the reverence and humility with which we ought to approach the task of worship. We can also be more joyful, knowing that each and every person is weekly invited to join in the presence of God, singing His praise and partaking in the beloved community of the Church.