

What Happens When We
WORSHIP

Jonathan Landry Cruse



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What Happens When We Worship
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To my parents,
with warmest love and unspeakable gratitude



And “to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins
by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God
and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever
and ever.” (Rev. 1:5–6 ESV)

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Foreword

My parents enjoyed telling about the first time they visited a Reformed church. Late for church, they decided to walk across the street to a Dutch Reformed congregation. “What was it like?” They explained the liturgy in detail, with its back-and-forth movement between God’s speech and the congregation’s response, including corporate confession of sin and declaration of pardon, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. “It seemed Catholic,” they said. “We didn’t know anything but our own church background”—which definitely was not *that*.

Walking into a traditional Reformed or Presbyterian service, one might at first blush feel a little out of place. Hopefully, there are at least warm greetings from members before and after, maybe even an offer of hospitality to someone’s home, but the service itself can feel like you’re crashing someone else’s family reunion.

Reformed worship is certainly not Roman Catholic or high church, but it is also quite different from most evangelical settings. Precisely because it is a family gathering of those who are united in Christ by common Christian beliefs and practices but also with distinct inflections, it’s the type of thing that grows on you. There is a depth to the fellowship in common baptism, prayer, praise, the hearing of the word (often lengthy sections) read and preached, and the Lord’s Supper. It takes a while, but there is a reason for things. It isn’t just tradition, but a long practice that is at least supposed to be grounded thoroughly in Scripture.

Many Reformed and Presbyterian churches today happily cast off what they consider the chains of a scripturally regulated gathering of God’s people, embracing either more high-church or contemporary

worship. Bored with the simplicity of Reformed worship, many find in other churches more exciting features. Some prefer to be engulfed in the sights and sounds of mystery, while others want to be enveloped in the more familiar sights and sounds of popular culture. But we have to stop and ask ourselves, “What happens in worship?”

The so-called worship wars—whether we have an organ and choir or a praise band—are distracting us from asking this deeper question. Jonathan Cruse has already given a taste of what he is up to with his title. Indeed, what happens?

The answer for many churchgoers, whether high church or low, is mainly about what *we* do. We go to church to praise the Lord, for example. Or we go to church to fellowship. In our most honest moments, we might say that we go to church because we’re commanded to—it’s a duty, a habit. According to Roman Catholic teaching, the liturgy is “the work of the people”; although more involved in the service since Vatican II, the people are still largely spectators until, with the priest and the whole church, they offer the sacrifice of the Mass. In contemporary evangelical settings, the professionals on the stage are often just as prominent. In any case, the idea across the spectrum seems to be that we are the active party. It is our fervor and zeal or our correct performance of ritual that brings God down to us.

More important than any other distinctive of Reformed worship is that we come primarily not to serve but to be served by God the Father, in His Son, through the power of the Spirit working through His word. Just as He did in John 13, Jesus comes to wash His disciples’ feet. He comes to give us a kingdom, to make us part of His kingdom. He announces full pardon and justification by grace alone simply on the basis of what He has done. He is present in the word—preached, sung, read, and given in baptism and the Supper. As we are told by the apostle Paul in Romans 10, we do not have to climb up to heaven to bring Him down or descend into the depths to somehow make Him alive and present among us. “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)” (v. 8 ESV). We place so much emphasis on the word because it is through the gospel that the Spirit creates and sustains the

faith of longtime believers and outsiders alike. Every service should be evangelistic!

There is definitely an important place for praise, but, as in the Psalms—the inspired book of praise—God’s work has to be set before us before we have anything for which to praise Him. I always find it interesting when I hear the musical part of the service referred to as the “worship time.” In many contexts, the time devoted to the reading and exposition of Scripture as well as common confession and prayer pale in comparison to the often individualistic self-expression of singing along with the musicians. We sing not merely to express our piety but, again, to receive: “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” (Col. 3:16 ESV). Interestingly, we are not just expressing our feelings to God but are “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with [our] heart” (Eph. 5:19 ESV). Reformed Christians have always cherished singing the Psalms especially because there is a song for every occasion and emotion. It’s not all joyful praise. There are also agonizing lament, honest questioning, and spiritual depression. Our Christian experience is a mixed bag. It is a real relationship with the Father in Christ, and so we should be able to relate honestly with God together and to have our eyes lifted up together in hope by His promises.

There is also an important place for fellowship. After all, each local church is an expression of the one body of Christ. Yet here too, there can be no church at all without the word—not only preached but read and prayed and sung and received in the two sacraments appointed by Christ. Our fellowship is not generated by shared cultural influences or generational, ethnic, socioeconomic, or political affinity; not by the sort of music we like (opera versus rock concert), but by “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:5).

There is an important place for duty—even good habits. Sometimes we do not feel like going to church, but if mere obligation gets us to where the gifts are, we return home the richer. Yet mere duty in the long run, without the gospel, is vain and superstitious.

There are many important biblical teachings shaping Reformed worship that this book will explain. The most important thing, however, is that it's not about us but for us. We come to church not even primarily to worship but to receive once again that life-sustaining Bread of Life in the variety of ways His word comes to us. We come not to do something again, but to have something done to us again; not to join various causes and kingdoms in this age, but because Christ has "*made* [us] a kingdom and priests to our God" who are justified, are being sanctified, "and they shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10 ESV, emphasis added).

What happens in worship? God is at work, and the best thing we can do is receive it. I've known Jonathan Cruse for many years now and have enormous respect for his gifts not only in theology but in music. This book will broaden and deepen your vision while narrowing it on "the Author and Finisher of our faith." *Please* read, mark, and inwardly digest the teaching in this important book.

—Michael Horton
J. Gresham Machen Professor of
Systematic Theology and Apologetics
Westminster Seminary California

Acknowledgments

My interest in all things related to worship began in earnest in my college years, when, in God's providence, I became close friends with several different church musicians. The world of corporate worship was open to me through the beautiful doors of corporate praise. These friends and mentors got me thinking about excellence in worship as a whole, something I had given far too little thought to before. For that, I am grateful to Paul, Tim, and Jared.

In terms of this particular manuscript, thanks is due to my dear friends Bob and Mary Jackson, who carefully combed through my many mistakes, offered extraordinary insight and helpful suggestions, and have made this a much stronger work.

I am indebted to the expert critique, comments, and encouragement offered by Glen Clary, Jonny Gibson, Darryl Hart, Terry Johnson, and Alan Strange. Go read all of their work on worship. Likewise, I am extremely humbled by the edifying foreword by Michael Horton, whose work on this subject has had a deep influence in my life. My colleagues Luke Sayers and Jeff Wilson were exceptional conversation partners throughout the project, and Linda and Bob Jones helped in ways that only they can.

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Thanks are due to the RHB team, who have been so wonderful to work with yet again. Thank you to Joel, David, Steve, and Annette! And especially to Jay, who championed this project from the very beginning. Thank you to my wife, Kerri Ann, for always sharing in my excitement about writing projects. I don't know where I would be without her constant encouragement.

Finally, I offer my deepest gratitude to my parents. Dad and Mom: you cultivated an atmosphere of eager anticipation every week as we would get ready for church. Even through difficult days in the lives of our various congregations, worship was a priority—and a joyful one at that. Sunday mornings are some of my fondest memories of growing up in the yellow house on Walnut Street. To you both I dedicate this book.

What Happens When We Worship?

The truly penitent man glories in the supernatural, for he knows that nothing natural would meet his need.

— J. Gresham Machen

Worship is a supernatural event. Have you ever considered that?

It's an obvious statement, really. An event in which we interact with a supernatural being must, by definition, be supernatural. Then why is it that we so often approach worship with a sense of boredom instead of astonishment, with yawns instead of awe, with resentment instead of reverence? Why is it that rather than seeing worship as a supernatural event, we clump it in with the other mundane things we have to get done during the week? Going to church gets the same checkmark on the to-do list as going to the grocery store or doing homework.

If I were to ask you, What happens when you go to church?—that is, what goes on during the actual worship service—how would you answer? Some people might answer, “Well, there’s some preaching, a little praying, and a lot of singing.” Others may say, “We read our Bibles, watch a presentation from the youth group, stand up at one point and shake everyone’s hand,” and so on. But that’s not what I mean. Those answers tell me the various elements that make up the service. My question is one that seeks to go beyond that. What are these elements for? What are they accomplishing? What *happens* when we worship?

This book is written from a simple but important premise: something *is happening* when we worship. Something happens *to* us, something happens *between* us and the people we worship with, and, most importantly, something happens *between us and God*.

Many people hold to a “spectator” approach to worship: church is somewhere you go to watch something. You might stand up here or there and recite a line or two printed in the bulletin or shown on the big screen; in that sense you are participating, but by and large the event is something to watch. This makes going to worship not much different from going to the movies or to a football game. Others hold to a “club” approach: church is somewhere you go to hang around with like-minded people and do projects together. From this perspective, what goes on in church is not different from what goes on at 4H, the Girl Scouts, or your local book club.

But what goes on in the church’s worship *is* different from these things! Going to worship is different from going to the cinema or the stadium, and it’s different from attending a meeting of a local social club because worship—real, true, faithful worship—is supernatural. The God of the universe appears and meets with His people, and by His sovereign and gracious power He changes them. It’s astounding! It’s unlike anything this world could ever offer. And yet how easy it is to forget that something as spectacular as this is happening when we come to church.

The Church Is a Bore, but She Is Our Mother

Astounding and *spectacular* are perhaps not the first adjectives most people would use to describe the average church-going experience, especially in the traditionally Reformed genre from which this book is written. Along with *astounding* and *spectacular* you could also strike *thrilling*, *exciting*, and any other word that even hints at the idea that worship could capture affections and attentions. Instead, many people would charge worship with being boring, dull, dry, and tedious. And even if some of us haven’t said it out loud, most of us have thought it at one point.

Some Christians think boredom in worship is a badge of honor. In an effort to ensure that the church remains distinct from the world, they have mistakenly presumed that God actually intends our services to be insipid. They believe the monotony to be a sign of sincere worship. Anything that might stir the emotions must be from Satan. There are still others who, though they may not enjoy that church is boring, have

errantly concluded that this must be the way it is. They have resigned themselves to slugging through the humdrum of Sunday out of obligation (whether to God, family, or friends) but are dreaming of something better that must be out there for them—think forlorn Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* singing, “There must be more than this provincial life!”

Let’s at least admit that at first glance the worship service can seem dull. There’s no point arguing that. There is a lot of sitting. There is a lot of listening. There is a lot of patience required. For an active culture with a notoriously short attention span constantly inundated with images, videos, push notifications, and ringers, it is no wonder an hour of concerted stillness seems like a chore.

But just because it seems dull doesn’t mean it is dull. It simply means we are not aware of what is happening when we worship. This is why God is not pleased with those who wear the boredom badge with honor or with those who dutifully suffer through the service while secretly wishing church wasn’t an obligation. God is not pleased with this because in both cases these people have completely missed out on the marvel of worship. God wants from us nothing less than hearts, souls, and minds that are fully enraptured with the wonder of biblical worship from beginning to end—which is to say, He wants us to be fully enraptured with Him. He wants us thrilled at the thought of coming to church to sing His praise, fellowship with His saints, lift up our prayers to His throne, hear His word, celebrate the sacraments of His covenant, and receive His blessing. Anything else would mean we fail at the great exhortation of Psalm 100:2: “Serve the LORD with gladness.”

After an Aesthetic

Sadly, many Christians think that the only way to worship with joy and gladness is through manufactured means. So what have people done to solve this perceived weariness of worship? Generally speaking, when the boredom and dullness of worship become too oppressive, people will turn to one of two alternatives: an aesthetic of entertainment or an aesthetic of mysticism.¹

1. Terry L. Johnson notes something similar using the categories of the “Contemporary Worship Movement” and the “Liturgical Renewal Movement,” which cropped

The Entertainment Aesthetic

The first alternative is perhaps the most prevalent today, and that is the solution proposed by the modern mainstream evangelical church. These churches generally have a very talented (and/or loud) band leading the singing. Perhaps the music is the bulk of the church's worship activity. There will be cool graphics and videos projected onto a large screen to accompany the various portions of the service. The pastor invariably will be charming and hip, and his messages will be conversational and "down-to-earth." The church will provide an array of programs that will keep your kids busy throughout the week—and even during the worship service.

Admittedly, this is a bit of a stereotype, but it paints a picture of what many in mainstream evangelicalism are doing today. They are pursuing a particular aesthetic in worship, and it really is nothing other than the aesthetic of entertainment. Many church services will be barely distinguishable from secular concert venues: dim sanctuary, impressive stage lighting and props, and loud music. Church becomes a place where you go to be entertained. A Sunday morning with your church family ends up looking not all that different from a Saturday night out with your friends.

The Garden, a progressive United Methodist church in Indianapolis, is an example. The "worship" band generally plays popular secular music played on many radio stations. The sermons are around fifteen minutes long and are often interspersed with video clips from famous movies. On The Garden's website, they boast that their church "succeeds in blurring the lines between the sacred and secular." The reason? To get people into church! According to this approach, the sacred is boring and unappealing, but the secular will draw people in and keep them in.

Another illustration of this approach comes from a pastor friend of mine who was driving with his family down south when they passed a billboard for a local church. There were several photos on the

up to fill the void created by a lack of attention to historic Reformed Protestant worship. *Worshipping with Calvin: Recovering the Historic Ministry and Worship of Reformed Protestantism* (Darlington, England: EP, 2014), 27.

advertisement: a band onstage with lights and fog, children playing games outside, and young couples laughing around the coffee bar. In big, bold letters the caption read: “Church was never meant to be boring.”

I couldn’t agree more with that statement. Church was never meant to be boring. And, in fact, church isn’t boring. But you can see what the caption combined with those images was implying: this particular congregation had recovered 11 a.m. on Sunday from the dungeon of droll. They were saying, “Come worship with us. We have made church exciting! We have made it fun! We have made it entertaining! Don’t be bored when you could have a good time enjoying the show we put on for you!” There’s a flaw in this thinking, though: that worship is something we have to *make* exciting. No, corporate worship is not boring, and that’s not because of anything we do; it’s because of God’s presence in and among us. No matter our productions or programs, we can’t manufacture that kind of supernatural wonder—and we certainly can’t top it either.

A more serious flaw with this approach—a fatal flaw, even—is that it wins people to worship with something that will tickle their fancies and yet never save their souls. This approach (sometimes deigned “seeker sensitive”) did not just fall out of the sky in the last few decades. The intrusion of entertainment in worship today can trace its roots back to the work of revivalist minister Charles G. Finney (1792–1875). An American Presbyterian minister, Finney became famous for the methods employed at his meetings, later known as the “new measures,” which were carefully designed to manipulate an emotional response from the crowd. For Finney, there was a formula that, employed correctly, would guarantee interest in the things of God. He said so himself: “A revival is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophic [i.e., scientific] result of the right use of the constituted means.”² It was this sort of ministry that caused Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) to remark in the 1800s that “the devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that part of their mission is to

2. As quoted in D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2007), 113.

provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them.”³ These words are just as true today.

The Mystical Aesthetic

For some people, a second alternative to enduring the supposed banality of Reformed worship is to join the ranks of more ritualistic and High Church worship services provided by the likes of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Episcopacy. They by and large reject the drum set and light show for the literal smells and bells of these more mystical services. Mystics, narrowly speaking, believe that a person can be caught up into the divine essence by sincere meditation and contemplation, by casting off the trappings of the physical world and being lost in reflection on the spiritual world. I am sure many congregations and congregants are not after anything as ambitious as becoming one with the divine essence (though this is a main tenant in Eastern Orthodox teaching). Many people follow mysticism in the broader sense of the term, hoping for worship to give them an experience and the sense that they are part of something greater and more important than their everyday routine; something more fantastical, something otherworldly—indeed, something supernatural.

My argument in this book is that something supernatural is happening when we worship. This group would agree entirely. But they would say that in their services you can actually *feel* what’s happening. It’s not the entertainment aesthetic; it’s a mystical aesthetic. There is something that seems to be spiritually palpable about incense, chants, and gestures. There has been an increase in the last few decades of Protestants abandoning their tradition for the sake of Roman Catholicism, and pastor and theologian Sam Storms concludes that a major reason is for these aesthetic matters: “Many appeal to the experience of being moved by the architecture of Roman Catholic church structures, the incense, the beauty of liturgy, the mystery, the solemnity, the drama,

3. C. H. Spurgeon, “Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats,” *Reformation and Revival* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1993), Resource Library, The Gospel Coalition, <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/feeding-sheep-or-amusing-goats>.

the vestments of the clergy, the church calendar, the sense of transcendence, religious symbolism,” he writes.⁴

In many cases, this mystical aura is achieved at the price of theology. As an example, take the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which asserts that the bread and wine literally transform into the actual body and blood of Christ. There is something stirring at the thought of being able to tangibly hold Christ, and this is undoubtedly why many people are drawn to this type of worship. But does a biblical and Reformed service offer us anything less? Biblical and Reformed theology states that we are present with Christ through the ministry and mystery of the Holy Spirit for the entirety of the worship service. What, then, would be appealing about a doctrine that gives me Christ for only a few brief seconds in a tiny wafer and a few drops of wine?

Another popular reason Protestants are jumping ship for Rome is because of perceived historical pedigree.⁵ Could it be that the Reformation was a rebellion against the true Christian religion and the Roman Catholics are the keepers of the sacred faith once delivered to all the saints? More than that, compared to the splintering of countless denominations in Protestantism, the Roman Catholic Church seems to stand as solid and strong as one of her ancient cathedrals. Stepping into its worship can feel like going back in time. But there are issues with this argument as well. Just because something feels old, and even is old, does not mean it is right. Besides, Reformed Protestantism also boasts an ancient tradition—the whole way back to the apostles. Our worship is a reflection of the devotion of the New Testament church, which “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). All this, mind you, took place in people’s homes and not inside breathtaking cathedrals.

Aspects of this mystical approach—the theological considerations of architecture or the concerted effort to use form prayers and other liturgical practices, for example—are by no means inherently wrong

4. Sam Storms, “Another Protestant Converts to Catholicism: Why?,” *Enjoying God* (blog), April 3, 2014, <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/another-protestant-converts-to-catholicism:-why>.

5. For an excellent treatment on this matter, see D. G. Hart, *Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018).

or unbiblical. But there is a major problem when we think we need to go through these motions to achieve anything meaningful in worship. Again, worship *is* meaningful—not because of what we do but because of what God is doing in and through us by His Spirit.

Awakened to Worship

Many people approach worship as though it were the ecclesiastical equivalent of brussels sprouts, which we all know can be stomached only if they are roasted in oil, tossed in balsamic vinegar and honey, and heavily salted (even better if wrapped in bacon!). But worship is not brussels sprouts. It doesn't need to be dressed up. It is entirely wonderful all on its own. But we can often be blind to that. Even in a church that seeks to worship according to God's prescribed methods in Scripture—in a service where God's Spirit is present and active—the worshipers themselves can be completely unaware of what is going on around them. This means that how a particular congregation approaches the worship service as a corporate entity is not all that matters—how I myself as a Christian individual and son and servant of God approach worship is of crucial significance.

John Antioco would know what I'm talking about. Antioco was the former CEO of Blockbuster, who, back in 2000, passed up the opportunity to buy a fledgling company known as Netflix for only fifty million dollars. You know the rest of the story. Blockbuster is out of business and Netflix is now worth well over thirty billion dollars.⁶ Just because Antioco was blind to the potential of Netflix didn't mean it lacked potential. Indeed, his decision cost him the deal of a lifetime. In church we often miss out on a great deal, just as Antioco did. Our vision is clouded to the potential—truly, the power—of what is going on around us in worship. But just because we don't see or sense it doesn't mean it's not there. It just means we need the same thing that Elisha's servant needed: we need God to open our eyes (2 Kings 6:17–20).

6. Celena Chong, "Blockbuster's CEO Once Passed Up a Chance to Buy Netflix for Only \$50 Million, July 17, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/blockbuster-ceo-passed-up-chance-to-buy-netflix-for-50-million-2015-7>.

If you are like me, you have grown up in the church—for me it was a Presbyterian and Reformed church, but this could be your experience coming from any ecclesiastical background—and the aspects of worship have become somewhat second nature. They don't require you to give much thought to them. Much like you don't have to think very hard about the route you drive to church week in and week out, you find you do not have to think very hard about what you are doing in church when you actually get there. Almost mechanically your hand is on the songbook as the "amen" is said in the opening prayer. The check goes into the offering plate and you don't even remember writing it. Worship has become a going-through-the-motions exercise. Sadly, this is the case for many Christians today.

This is not a new problem. Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs (1599–1646) had to exhort the people of his day to "learn what it is you do when you come to worship God." He says that if he went from one side of his congregation to the next and asked each person, "Is it your duty to worship God?" they would all answer proudly in the affirmative. Burroughs laments, however, that if he were to go around the sanctuary again and ask, "And what does worship look like exactly? What is it that you do when you worship? What is happening when you worship?" many of those same congregants would be perplexed and speechless.⁷

The Aim of This Book

This book seeks to remedy that ignorance and indifference that have plagued and continue to plague many worshipping Christians. By exposing what's really happening in these moments of corporate worship, I hope to take the rote out of the routine and in its place produce a zeal for God and gratitude to Him for what He does for us in worship. I want to open our eyes—to wake us up—to what is going on (and has *always* been going on) around us every time we gather to worship in Spirit and in truth. Since God is an infinite God, His worship is infinitely interesting. We can never plumb the depths of who He is nor ever exhaust the stores of His goodness, grace, and glory. Worship is

7. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship: Worship Worthy of God* (1653; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 35.

the grand exploration and exaltation of who God is. If the moment of worship seems dull to us, the fault lies with us, not with God.

To do this, part 1 will establish some guiding principles about worship, generally speaking. We could consider this a brief biblical theology of worship: tracing what the Scriptures teach us about the nature, purpose, and result of meeting with God as His called and gathered people.

The following chapters in part 2 will unpack what actually happens during each of the major elements of standard Reformed worship. Here we zoom in and carefully walk through each element of the service. For indeed, the entirety of the service is worship! The worship service does not primarily reside in the sermon, nor are we only worshiping when we sing (a misconception not helped by our regular use of *worship* as a synonym for *music*). According to D. A. Carson, “it is folly to think that only part of the ‘service’ is worship.” This kind of understanding of corporate worship is “so bizarre, from a New Testament perspective, as to be embarrassing.”⁸ Every aspect of the Lord’s Day service, from the call to worship to the benediction, is worship, which is why this book on worship will devote some time to every element.

God is doing something to us and for us and through us in each element of the worship service. We will be exploring how God uses things like reading the Bible, singing, preaching, and the Lord’s Supper as means to convict us of sin and actually conform us into the people we are meant to be. We will see worship is the place where we undergo a transformation. Who would have thought something as “boring” as church could do something so thrilling? Maybe church isn’t boring after all! It’s a powerful thing, worship. And it deserves our careful attention. Part 3 will conclude with some observations and tips on how we can best do just that.

A prayer of mine is that this book may also prove useful if you are not a Christian and have very little experience with worship. If you’ve ever wondered, *What are those people doing every Sunday?* this book will help. The practice of churchgoing can seem bizarre. After all, aren’t there better ways to spend a Sunday? (The answer is no.) My prayer

8. D. A. Carson, “Worship under the Word,” in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 47.

is that this book will show you why Christians devote such time and energy to the act of worship and why you should too.

But ultimately I want to recover worship from the doldrums. Let me rephrase that: I want to recover the *perception* of worship as being the doldrums. Worship is never dull, but we are sometimes. Churchgoing is monotonous and mundane only because our eyes are blinded to the supernatural wonder that is taking place all around us. The reality is that worship is an exhilarating experience. So we don't need smoke machines, more lights, dramatic presentations, louder music, mystical theology, or entertaining speakers to make worship exciting. We simply need to understand what's going on in the first place. It doesn't matter if your week is filled with skydiving, speed racing, or whatever your personal taste for adventure might be. No matter what your week looks like, Sunday worship is the highlight. And we're going to see why in this book.

Admittedly, we are just going to be scratching the surface here. There could easily be ten more chapters in this book, and each chapter could easily be ten times longer. But I'm not seeking to present a fully exhaustive treatment on the subject of worship. Rather, this is meant to be an important introduction to, or perhaps a gentle reminder of, the topic. My aim is to whet your appetite when it comes to worship. For indeed it is in corporate worship that we are able to "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8).

Discussion Questions

1. Why do we so often find church to be boring?
2. In what ways have Christians attempted to manufacture “exciting” worship experiences?
3. Describe the “entertainment aesthetic” and the “mystical aesthetic” approaches to worship.
4. In what ways are these different approaches distinct from one another and in what ways are they similar to one another?
5. How is ignorance a major problem for us when we come to worship?