



**A study group resource in eight sessions
to accompany Chris Ellis during his year as
President of our Union**

www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw



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Introduction

Welcome to this new resource to accompany Chris Ellis during his year as president of our Union.

Chris, one might say, literally wrote the book on Baptist worship. As the co-editor of *Gathering for Worship*, the words and liturgies he helped to pull together are used in our churches each week. He is the author of several books on the subject, including *Approaching God*, his work honed by many years as a local church minister, Principal of Bristol Baptist College and life in general.

To tap into this vast experience Chris was interviewed by Ruth Rice, a fellow Baptist pastor in Nottingham, for *Baptists Together* magazine ahead of his year as President (2014-15). The resulting conversation explored dimensions of worship (and more), and contained such interesting reflections it has now been converted into an eight-session course suitable for small groups.

Each session features a short (five to ten minutes) video clip of the conversation, accompanied by a biblical verse and a series of questions to help delve into some of the points raised in the film.

The questions are deliberately open-ended – there are no right or wrong answers! – and are offered as discussion starters. There may be other points you wish to examine, so there is no need to follow the questions in the order in which they are presented. We simply suggest you begin in prayer, read the scripture, watch the clip, and take it from there, using the questions as a guide but with the freedom to wander. There is also space on the website after each session to offer reflections and feedback, and we would love to hear how you are getting on. Please share your feedback at www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw

Ultimately we hope the resource reflects the conversation: relaxed but challenging, one which prompts further reflection on our relationship with God, and in doing so, serving to deepen it.



Session 1: The labels we use

Bible verses:

1 Samuel 16:7

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Introduction:

It's both natural and understandable to use labels to describe ourselves or others, as they help to define and explain who we are. We are all individuals with different experiences and gifts, and ultimately our identity as Christians lie in Christ.

We can learn much working and walking alongside each other, and in this clip Chris highlights the importance of ecumenical relationships in his long ministry. The ministry of the Holy Spirit and silent prayer are also mentioned.

Watch the Video:

Session 1 can be viewed or downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw1



Questions:

- Describe yourself with labels – who are you? (Not just a Christian, but as a person)
- What labels do you think others would use to describe you?
- God knows you intimately, and loves you... How do you think he sees you?

Where have you experienced different forms of church? In what ways has this enriched your spirituality?

What has been your relationship with Christians from different churches and denominations? What can your own church learn from a neighbour? Are there ways your church can work alongside a neighbouring one?

Chris talks about his renewal journey, and how important the ministry of the Holy Spirit has been in that ministry. In what ways have you experienced renewal? Can you describe your own renewal journey? Is it still having an effect? What does it mean to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit?

Chris also touches upon the contemplative and silent prayer in his quest to go deeper spiritually. How are you seeking to go deeper?

Please share your reflections and feedback at: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw1

Transcript:

Ruth: *We are near neighbours in terms of our churches' geography. New Life Baptist Church is a plant from West Bridgford. You're about to be president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain - how does it feel?*

Chris: It feels good and I'm looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to being able to engage with folk around the country and share fellowship and scripture with them.

R: *How have you found yourself at this point - and give up a year of your own time when you could have your feet up with a pipe and helping other churches?*

C: Well, I'm not sure - I think I'll have to put it down to other people, and God has something to do with it. What you've alluded to is that formally I'll reach a big birthday a couple of months after the Assembly, and I'll cease to be a pastor of a local church. Marilyn my wife and I will be moving from Nottingham to Sheffield. Formally retirement will begin, but yes, I'll be president of the Union and will be continuing in ministry.

I think retirement is a time to do what you enjoy and want to do. There will be aspects of my ministry that will continue long beyond either retirement or my year as President. I guess it's a transition personally, but also that retirement gives me the opportunity to do some travelling and meet folk around the country.

R: *I think folk have spotted as I have, as a fellow minister alongside you, that you are multi-talented. We're sitting in your multi-book lined room, and I have been the beneficiary of many of the books you've been able to offer me as I've come into ministry. If people were to say what sort of a man are you, what sort of President will you be, what sort of labels would you give yourself? I've called you Cathlo-Baptist*

C: Certainly I am a Baptist. I was brought up in a Baptist church, I was baptised at the age of 12. According to the people around me I first said I wanted to be a minister at the age of 7. So it's been a life-long experience and focus.

My experience as a minister and a Christian has always been in relationship with other Christians. I've been ecumenically committed, so I can understand why you might call me a Bapto-Catholic. I've always wanted to learn from, work with, worship with and pray with other Christians. Some of my times as a minister over the years - and it's been 42 years now since I was first ordained - have been in situations where I have worked ecumenically, either in local ecumenical projects or churches together or in the college at Bristol where we have a very close relationship with the other colleges, the Methodists but particularly the Anglicans. We team-taught and had shared classes, and that was a great and stimulating experience, so the ecumenical dimension would be important to me.

But the more you engage with other Christians, the more you have a sense of what your convictions are, and I'm very clearly a Baptist, working ecumenically.

There are other labels people use as well. I would want to say I am evangelical. The whole of my ministry is focused on the gospel, and especially the gospel of grace. Though some might be surprised, I would use the adjective charismatic. I would not say I am a charismatic, I am not a party charismatic, but I've had my own renewal journey, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit has been very important in that ministry.

But I'm also contemplative, and increasingly I want to find time to be in silent prayer, to be seeking to go deeper in my spiritual life. The more challenges that life throws at you, the more there is an encouragement to go deeper.



Session 2: A lifetime of discovery

Bible Verses:

Ephesians 3: 14-21

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Introduction:

Exploring God will take a lifetime. As Chris begins to unpack the Higher, Deeper, Wider theme of his presidential year, he shares his restlessness to know more, to be closer to God, and his sense that he is still a beginner. Though there is a realisation that we will never truly know God – at least here on earth – there is a great encouragement to keep searching and exploring.

Watch the Video:

Session 2 can be viewed or downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw2



Questions:

Think back to when you first became a Christian. What was it like? Can you talk through the steps that led you to believe? Where are you in your relationship with God today?

A hunger, a yearning, an appetite for more of God - all are spoken of in this clip. Do you still feel this hunger God? If so, how do you feed your hunger? If not, how do you recreate this hunger?

Has there been a period in your life when a hunger for God has been more intense than others? What were the circumstances?

Chris describes the second half of Ephesians 3 as a well he often visits. Which parts of the Bible do you often go to? What do they say to you?

Chris also reveals how he still feels a beginner in his Christian life. In what areas do you feel a beginner? In what areas do you feel you have arrived?

Look at verse 20: *'Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.'* Christ is at work within in you. Reflect on that. Take a moment to dream. What are you dreaming?

Please share your reflections and feedback at: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw2

Transcript:

Ruth: *So what's your focus for your presidential year?*

Chris: The theme I've chosen, and it's been picked up as the theme for the Assembly as well, is Higher, Deeper, Wider. That's my take on the second half of Ephesians chapter 3, which is a half chapter I continue to return to over and over and over again. It's been very important for me, it continues to be a place, a well I go to drink, and I felt that this was something I wanted to share with other people. There was a sense of something that was exciting and enriching for me, it might well be worth sharing with other people. That was the starting point.

There was this sense of being rooted in Christ, being strengthened by the power of God's Spirit, all there in Ephesians 3, this sense of comprehending what is the height and depth and length and breadth, to know the love of Christ, though it's beyond what we can know. These are things that really challenge and encourage and invite me to go deeper, and higher and wider. I felt because it turned me on, it might well be challenging for other people.

R: *So with over many years experience in local church leadership, being the Principal of a Bible college, many people might think you've already gone higher, deeper and wider, and you're going to teach us how to do that. What is it about your own journey, that means you have chosen this and knowing it will do you good? What are the aspects that you've been involved in that keeps you hungering for more?*

C: There are two things there. The hungering one, that's the constant part of who I am as a Christian. My spirituality is about yearning. I believe that's the moving of the spirit within me, that I yearn to know more about God, to be closer to God. I want to understand more, I want to share more. That's a constant thing, that restlessness, that seeking after God. But it's not about arrival, it's about continuing to seek. It's not high, deep, wide - it's higher, deeper, wider. It's about continuing to reach out, to stretch out in these dimensions of the gospel.

The other thing is somebody asked me a few days ago about how I might describe myself. The word that came to me was the word beginner. I've got grey hair, I've been at it in human terms quite a long time in terms of ministry, but I still feel a beginner.

In my Christian life I still feel a beginner. In my understanding of theology I still feel a beginner. In my leisure pursuits, and art is a pastime of mine, I still feel a beginner. I want to do better, I want go further. There is that continual restlessness, to know more, to go deeper. That's just how I'm made, and it seems to me that higher, deeper, wider is inviting other people to go on that journey, to share that restlessness.

The deadliest thing is complacency, or a sense of arrival. No, there is much more, God is so much bigger.



Session 3: What is Worship?

Bible Verses:

Deuteronomy 6:5

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Psalm 100: 1-5

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

John 4: 24

God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.

Introduction:

There are many aspects to worshipping God: in this session Chris talks about communal worship – when the church or a group of believers have gathered in order to engage with God, the preparation that goes into it, and the importance of mixing things up.

Watch the Video:

Session 3 can be viewed or downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw3



Questions:

What is your experience of the gathered, communal worship? Do you always encounter God? Does God always encounter you?

What works well? When do you feel most engaged? What are your frustrations? Can you talk about when you last encountered God?

How do we, as individual Christians, prepare as worshippers? Are we consumers or participants? Do we expect to meet God? In what ways do we allow our preferences or prejudices to distract us from engaging with God?

In light of this, how would you intend to prepare differently next time?

When talking about prayers, Chris comments: *“The danger of wholly relying on spontaneity is that we go into a default position and the same themes, images and language occur time after time.”* Do you and/or your church have a blend of styles of prayer? How might you or your church’s prayer life be enriched?

Please share your reflections and feedback at: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw3

Transcript:

Ruth: *Chris, we'd like to have a chat about worship. You can ask people what it is, and they might say "My whole life is worship" or they'll say "It's the singing at the start of the service" Could you define for us as, a writer of many books, and hymns, and prayers on this subject, what you think worship is?"*

Chris: You're right - people will come up with different answers. The thing about singing is that people will say "Now we'll have a time of worship" as though the rest of the service isn't worship. Or even the rest of life. When I've asked people - often I've been in classes or groups and they've asked me to talk about worship - I'll say, "You tell me!". Some will be quite narrow answers - it's about devotion, or it's about adoring God, or it's about gathering for fellowship. All these are true, but they're not the whole picture. Somebody will come along and say, because they've read Romans 12, well the whole of life is worship.

I'll say yes it is, but when we're using the term worship, we need to be clear what we're talking about. In a sense the word worship is not relevant. What's the reality we're talking about when we talk about worship? It's when Christians gather for worship.

There is worship that is the individual person in prayer or Bible study, that's worship, yes. But what we're talking about is the communal worship, the church gathered for worship, for fellowship. When that happens they do it in order to engage with God - it's an encounter between God and the worshippers. It is a time when they use certain things to do that - singing and prayer and the reading and preaching of scripture. They use them in terms of the offering of themselves and their hearts. These are all parts of worship. But the worship itself is an encounter between God and the congregation.

R: *It's interesting you say it's this collective idea of worship. There would be many people who say it's not essential to gather. Our outward expression of worship is to do with our habits. You do place a very high emphasis on preparing to lead worship on a Sunday. Could you talk about why you think it's so important to get this right when we gather?*

C: Well, I think there are different types of preparation. Despite what you've said about me and liturgy, I would say that 90 per cent of the words I utter in worship are extemporary – they're spontaneous. So the preparation isn't in terms of a detailed script. That's not my style, I'm too much of an extrovert for that. But the preparation is in terms of praying through, reflecting through, exploring the themes that will be a part of that service.

I'll be very concerned that the structure, or the stages of the event we call the worship service, make some sense, that people go on a journey through the service. In their gathering, their sharing fellowship and focusing on God in praise and adoration, in their bring themselves honestly before God in their confession; in their giving thanks in their struggling with the Word and studying of the Word, and their response to that.

Devotionally before God their response in terms of their responsibility as they go out into God's world, that journey needs to be plotted, it needs to be navigated, so the preparation is partly about working that through. It will be different every week, as the theme and the scripture reading will be different. So that's preparation, but personally I don't script most of the words.

R: *Would you say a few people gathered in a room bringing a psalm is not a gathered worship, because no one has spent time crafting that? Our style is that people will come prepared to bring a word God has given them. Would that as a worship leader for you be a bit scary because it isn't part of the planned journey? How do you deal with extemporary prayer, worship coming from the body?*

C: I think what you have described is a perfectly valid way of people worshipping. I don't think I'm a control freak – others might think differently and spontaneity and sharing is one way Christians gather to worship. Personally if that was happening every week, that wouldn't satisfy me. I'd feel there'd be too much of a sameness about it. Because part of the preparation is a means of enabling there is variety week on week. You may well have heard some people pray in prayer meetings and it's extemporary, but it's nearly the same prayer every week. The danger of wholly relying on spontaneity is that we go into a default position and the same theme, images and language occurs time after time. That just needs enriching and refreshing, and you've got to put the work in.

R: *You were the co-editor of Gathering for Worship, the book many of us ministers are reliant on, particularly for funerals, weddings, times when extemporary words may fail us. So what's the place of liturgy? Do you think Baptists have lost it a bit? Do you think we should have a bit more written liturgy?*

C: I think there are different things going on. The word liturgy is something I would use that is synonymous with worship. I know people would say that's liturgical worship and that's non-liturgical worship, I understand people want to use the word to talk about a particular style of worship. I wouldn't normally use the word that way. I simply use it as a means of talking about worship.

But for worship that is more formal, that might have more written content, such as responses from the congregation, I think many Christians who have been used to very free worship have discovered there are riches there they can use.

It doesn't become the main means of worship, but one of the ways Gathering and other worship resources have helped, is that it has provided people with a launching pad to exploring a way of worship that's additional. I can think back to 20 years ago, when worship shouts and praise sequences came into the Spring Harvest approach to worship. This is nothing new – it's a kind of blending and weaving different styles. We are in a pick and mix culture and people are very happy to use different cultural symbols and ways of expressing themselves in order to worship, and that's fine.



Session 4: A Breadth of Worship

Bible Verses:

1 Corinthians 12: 12-27 (Unity and diversity in the body)

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Introduction:

Different churches worship in a variety of ways – but how important is that when it comes to determining why we choose to worship where we do? Differences in worship styles may point to deeper truths or issues: maybe it's about our relationships, and how determined we are to have our own way rather than the congregation together discerning God's way for them.

This session touches on our diversity, discerning God's will together, and being in fellowship with one another – both within our own church and beyond.

Watch the Video:

Session 4 can be viewed or downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw4



Questions:

Why are you worshipping where you are? What factors have called you to belong to this particular church/community?

Order these factors in priority:

- » Worship styles
- » Welcome
- » Quality of preaching
- » Catering for children
- » Belonging to a community
- » Relationships
- » Church's witness
- » Others

What elements would add value to our present style of worship? Is there something you have seen from another church or a festival that could be weaved into the life of your church?

In the clip Chris speaks about “worship wars”, congregations divided over styles of worship. In general, when we disagree about something, how much do we argue according to our preference, rather than what is God's way? How, in our own setting, do we make sure we are discerning God's will together?

Consider the phrase: “A key issue is whether those two very different churches are in fellowship with another – both in their witness to Christ in their community, and in their sharing fellowship together in worship.” What does this mean in your context?

When Chris was asked what worship is, he said: *“Firstly it is the community of God's people encountering God, seeking God in worship. Secondly it is seeking God's kingdom.”* How would you describe worship?

Please share your reflections and feedback at: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw4

Transcript:

Ruth: You talk about 'worship tourism' – can you explain that?

Chris: In the last 50 years there has been a loosening up between different Christian churches and groups, on the whole in a very positive way. Christians have worshipped together – that's partly been through the ecumenical movement, partly through the Charismatic movement. When they have worshipped together they have experienced different ways of worshipping, and they have been enriched by that.

Tourism – there's a difference between tourism and pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is where you go on a journey for a very specific purpose and there's a destination in sight. Tourism is where you go because you want to enjoy the view.

What we don't want in worship is spectators – it's not a spectator sport. It's something for participants. But that participation can be enriched when we borrow and receive from other traditions things that can be helpful that may not be part of our normal experience. So, liturgical churches, as you might call them, have often been loosened up by an openness to the Spirit. Spontaneous, free worship has often been enriched by the use of pre-prepared material which gives the congregation a voice.

R: *As Baptists we can embrace all of these because of the freedom we have not to conform. Do you see that happening? There would have been a point in time where worship and worship styles would have been a dividing factor, between your church and mine for example. We have a more contemporary style at times, but actually I think either of us would find ourselves at home in each other's churches. Do you think that that is something more recently has developed, is developing?*

C: Some decades ago a man by the name of Robert Webber – a great worship writer in the States, an evangelical - coined the phrase 'worship wars'. This was particularly the case in the States, but also the UK. That there are churches and congregations divided over the style of worship.

I think there are pastoral issues there. When I have talked about this with people I've suggested that the issue when there is division in a church over worship style, the issue isn't worship. The issue is a pastoral one, it's about relationships. And it's about having my way, as opposed to the congregation together discerning God's way for them.

My own preference is for a diversity, a variety within the worship of any particular church. There are different personalities, there are different ways that people have come to faith. One needs to be able to meet those needs, and enable all the congregation to worship. That means on some occasions there will be a dominant style, and on other occasions it might be there's variety in a single service. But hey, we're not in a one party state here, and we certainly don't want to be in worship.

R: *Do you think that's why different congregations exist - people will choose based on style, and if we were trying as ministers to meet needs, surely worship is for God, and therefore to pick a style means we can just get on with it, rather than trying to work out what everybody wants. Is there not a case that the soup or stew of all these different types of worship ending up being a mush that pleases nobody at all, let alone God?*

C: Do people choose a church because of a worship style, and are churches therefore offering different things? The danger with that is there is a consumerist assumption that people are free to choose what will satisfy their needs or tastes. There's always going to be an element of that, and I think in our

society people have been inculturated to be picky about what they want, whether the shop or brand or whatever, and to some extent with a mobile population, churches come into that.

But a key issue is not whether two churches are close together and people choose, but whether those two very different churches are in fellowship with one another. It's not just about different worship styles in two Baptist churches, it's about the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Quakers, the Baptists, the Methodists, the Pentecostal Church down the road; it's not that these are different, but in what sense are they also in fellowship with one another both in their witness to Christ in their community, and in their sharing fellowship together in worship.

At the end of the day you asked me about what worship is, and I want to say two things about worship. Firstly it is the community of God's people encountering God, seeking God in worship.

Secondly it is seeking God's kingdom. It is about praying for God's kingdom. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, it was with 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' So immediately the prayer on the one hand is 'Our Father who art in heaven', which is about our relationship with God, and secondly it's about praying that God's will be done and made manifest in the world today - praying for God's kingdom.

So worship is immediately focused on God, but also spilling out into the whole of life to the rest of the world.



Session 5: Giving your All

Bible Verses:

Deuteronomy 6:5

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Romans 12: 1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Hebrews 5: 13-14

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Introduction:

There are many aspects to worship, but it ultimately comes down to our relationship with God. We all have different ways of approaching God and are at different stages in our faith journey. In this session we look at what draws us closer to God.

Watch the Video:

Session 5 can be viewed or downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw5



Questions:

Chris and Ruth both describe the enthusiasm of new believers. When are you/have you been at your most enthusiastic when worshipping God?

In this clip there is talk of dancing, art, music and words – what draws you closer to God, and opens you to his Spirit? Why? How should a church respond knowing that its congregation is likely to engage with God in different ways?

Are you open to seeing God differently? In what ways have you seen God differently? How can we make sure we are looking at God from different angles? Is God challenging you to see him differently?

Chris is asked about 'instrumental abuse'; the times when we treat worship as a means to an end, when the main thing is its usefulness for us rather focusing on God. Are there times when this happens?

Hymn or song; organ or guitar... we probably all have our views and preferences. But what are the non-negotiables of worship?

Please share your reflections and feedback at: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw5

Transcript:

Ruth: *Let's have a chat about how worship that's not the event, connects to the whole of life. I heard an interview that you had when Approaching God came out, where you were very concerned the church often doesn't make these connections to the whole of life. When you are talking about the whole of life as worship, I've heard you coin a phrase 'instrumental abuse' in regard to worship: can you just explain what you mean by that?*

Chris: Instrumental abuse is not hitting somebody over the head with a guitar! It's when we misuse worship, when we make the main thing about worship its usefulness for us. It's when we treat it instrumentally, rather than what it is really about, which is about our relationship with God.

There are aspects of worship that bring a benefit to the worshippers. People talk about having a blessing, and so they are edified in worship. They are shaped and formed as Christians in worship. They receive pastoral care, in some ways, in worship. They learn about God, they engage in theology in worship. Worship is a place where mission will happen, and evangelism can take place.

But if these become the reasons why and the drivers of our worship, then that is treating worship instrumentally, it's treating it as a means to an end. That's not what I want to do. These are all important dimensions of worship, but they all only have meaning when worship is still focused on God.

R: *Worship as theology – there would be many people who would think: "How can worship be anything to do with theology or thinking?" They may feel that's going a step too far, and they're simple folk who just want to tell Jesus that they love him. When you're talking about worship as theology, are you talking about the words we use in hymns, in liturgy, how does that relate to when we worship God?*

C: Firstly we need to start with theology. Theology is our thinking about God, and our expressing what we believe about God. So the simplest believer, as you say, who just wants to love Jesus, in loving Jesus will want to tell other people about Jesus. They'll have to use words and have joined-up thoughts as to what they share with somebody else about why Jesus is important to them. And when they're doing that, they're doing theology.

So whenever we gather for worship, whenever we use words to express our worship of God, or we seek to receive through God from scripture, we are engaging in theology.

There's a health warning for worship, because we could have a discussion about what 'quality' might mean in worship. I believe there can be worship that's dysfunctional. One of the ways is if the things it expresses about God are not true. If what is presented about God in worship is not true to scripture, and true to our experience under the Holy Spirit, is not in the likeness of Christ, then I would say that that dysfunctional worship could be very damaging - because that worship will influence and shape people's development in faith. If the theology expressed in that worship is off the mark, it will have a health effect on their development as Christians.

R: *When somebody has first come to faith, or newly come to faith. I remember as a young person having this argument with a worship leader who didn't like a song that had something like 'yeah, yeah, yeah' quite a lot of times in it. My argument for the song was that, God the one who we are worshipping, would surely love a heartfelt "Yeah!" than a very dry recitation of many, many truths about him.*

If worship is for God, then surely it is for God to decide whether that well-meant and well-offered utterance is of good enough quality. I suppose I have an issue with quality control and worship. If that worship is to be extemporary, how do you decide if that thing that person is saying is truthful enough. For example, if they are a new Christian?

C: It's an organic thing, people grow in understanding. But also those who are leading worship are modelling something, and it's not that people have to copy them, but they are inevitably influenced by the language that's used by a worship leader.

So I think there is a huge responsibility in leading worship – the things you say, the implications about what you believe about God that are expressed in what you say, are ones that are going to be building up the church, and not taking them in a direction that's unhelpful.

Yes, a new believer sharing in worship, their enthusiasm, is something that will be given to the rest of the church, because many of us might pray we have the enthusiasm that we had when we first believed. That's something we want God to warm our hearts about. But God made us with heads as well as hearts. And so when Jesus was asked about the most important of the commandments, it was the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:5: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul and mind and strength.* It wasn't mind or heart, it was mind *and* heart.

So for me, words are important. I enjoy them; I enjoy reading them, I enjoy hearing them, I enjoy speaking them and writing them. They help us to clarify what we think. I recognise that's going to be more important for some people than for others. But it's a part of who I am.

Having said that increasingly I've become aware that words are very important, and yet there comes a point when they are not enough. I think it was St Augustine, who said once: "Standing before God, I must remain silent. Yet I have to speak." Words will be vitally important. Very often in worship the most profound moments are the silence after speaking, or after singing or after the prayer, that are full of the presence of God.

R: *You also talk in one of your books – there's a wonderful little phrase that somebody was asked "Why are you dancing?" – "It's because I can't fly", which I absolutely loved, because it's the giving of the whole of yourself. I wonder whether, beyond words, what is your experience of those moments that you have just described, like the silence? (which I have begun to increasingly love). So the 'beyond words' for the theologian? I know you wanted to talk about art, that's probably one of those places.*

C: I'm physically challenged in terms of dancing; it's something I can appreciate for others and understand, but it's not something that comes naturally to me. But the story was simply that the person was so full of wanting to worship, the way they expressed it was they wanted to fly. But they couldn't, so they were dancing, and that's going to be very important for many people, the movement, the use of their body in worship.

For me it's what I see. So art is important, it's one of my passions as a leisure pursuit, to paint and to draw. I believe it's a way I learn to see the world more clearly and differently. When you try and draw something you see it differently from before, you notice and give attention in a way you haven't before, and those are important things in prayer and worship.

And so for me symbols, things that you see, will be helpful, and they'll be helpful for some worshippers. For other people it will be movement and dance, for others it will be silence. These are all part of that variety that is an important part of a community that's made up of different people that God's created differently, with different gifts and needs.

R: *So going back to the theology of the words, have you got concerns about some of the newer worship songs, do you prefer hymns? I know you've written some hymns yourself, haven't you?*

C: A long time ago! In my leading of worship I probably now use more songs than I do hymns, although I think the crossover between hymns and songs has become increasingly blurred.

There are two things. Are there words I'm uneasy about? The words I tend to be uneasy about are the ones that emphasise subjectivity. While it's important to express personal faith, so many contemporary songs do seem to emphasise '*my* experience and *my* feelings'. They're important, but they're not the whole story.

As far as hymns and songs are concerned, I make a very simple distinction between the two. They're not to do with musical style at all. Hymns have a linear shape; you start at the beginning, and you go through them until you get to the end, and then you stop. There's a journey and a progression through the hymn.

A song is cyclical, it's something that you can repeat. It provides you an opportunity to stay in the moment. In terms of worship and worship leading and planning, both are important. You want hymns that take you forward in the journey of your expressing praise and worship, and what it is you believe about God, and it doesn't make sense to repeat that hymn. You start at the beginning and you move through it until you come to the conclusion.

The song is a place - 'I will stay here and I will wonder' - and I will open myself in worship to God. Many contemporary worship songs as they are called, are actually worship hymns. Many of the things that are currently favourites are in song style, in the sense they have a contemporary style and flavour, but they will progress – they will have a refrain, they will have a number of verses. You will start at the beginning, you might have some repeats, but you progress through from the beginning to the end. Townend and Kendrick are two examples of people who primarily write hymns rather than songs. So that's a structural thing. It's about how then it fits in worship. It's not so much about what kind of music it is, but how it helps people move in their journey of gathering and focusing on God and being open to God's Spirit.



Session 6: Worldly Worship

Bible Verses:

Ezekiel 47: 1-12

The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side.

As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross.

He asked me, “Son of man, do you see this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

Introduction:

God so loved the world, He sent His only Son; the world is His creation and he is intimately concerned about it. Our worship of God, our encounter with Him, should therefore overflow into all areas of life. He is out there – and is waiting for us to join in. Are we?

Watch the Video:

Session 6 can be viewed or downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw6



Questions:

You have gathered together on a Sunday morning or otherwise to worship God. In what ways does that affect the rest of the week?

Consider these phrases:

» 'The service has ended, the worship now begins.'

and:

» 'The worship has ended, the service now begins.'

To what extent do you agree with these statements? How do they apply to you? In what ways would you say your life is an act of worship/service?

How has a life event altered your worship experience? How has a worship experience altered your life?

"We don't take God with us, God is there waiting for us." Describe how this is your experience. How are you joining in?

Consider the phrase: *"We need to pray for secular concerns, we need to pray for peace and justice, we need to pray for the world which isn't resembling God's kingdom."* Are we doing that? How does intercessory prayer of this nature affect the way we live?

Please share your reflections and feedback at: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw6

Transcript:

Ruth: *You talk about worldly worship – can you explain what you mean by that?*

Chris: Many people have been brought up on a sense that worship is where you withdraw from the world, “We have come away from the world; help us Lord to put the world behind us so we can just focus on you.” I can understand the intentions of that and I understand the dynamic which is a part of that, which is the desire to focus on God. But the God that we focus on is a God who created the world. The gospel we preach is based upon God’s love for the world - God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

So we can’t separate ourselves from the world in that way. I mean, our forebears did - back in the time of the Puritans and the early Baptists, they spoke about the church as a kind of walled garden and people were kept holy by being kept away from the world. I understand again why that was so, but if you separate worship and the world, then the world is simply left to be completely secular. It becomes secularised if you like, and worship becomes ghettoised - it becomes an enclave of people who have their backs to the world in some kind of holy huddle.

And while we need to focus on God, the God we focus on is the great creator and redeemer of all humanity. So worldly worship is about seeking to engage worship and our concerns and lives in the world and to bring them together.

R: *I love this fact that we have a God who loves the world. But some people would still be saying isn’t worship the thing we do to get us ready to go into the world. Could you unpack a little bit more about this worldly worship, and how that’s going to develop in a church that sees what God sees in his world - in mission for example?*

C: I know it’s a cliché to talk about journeys, but it is a very powerful and helpful picture. I want to use it as we did in the introduction to *Gathering for Worship*, as a way of describing how you might shape the progression through a service, as a journey. And that journey is one that doesn’t have a destination - it’s one that continues back out into the world.

All my ministry, one of the key points has actually been the blessing at the end of the service. Not because the job’s done, but because it’s about expressing the fact that people are sent out in mission into the world - they go with God’s blessing but they go into God’s world. There is a continuity about what has been expressed, what’s been transacted, what’s happened in the worship event and then what continues outside that worship event in the rest of life.

So the God who is in worship, the God we encounter in worship, the God whose kingdom we have prayed for in worship, we then go and express that out there. Part of the theme *Higher, Deeper, Wider* is about trying to unpack what we might mean by going out into the world. For me an important part of that is the recognition that we don’t take God with us, God is there waiting for us.

Missiologists in recent years have talked about the *missio dei*, the mission of God. It’s not our mission, it’s God’s mission - and our role is to be open to the Holy Spirit, that God might use us and might work through us, but also that we might discern then what God is doing and seek to be available to the Spirit in those situations.

You prepare for that in worship, you rehearse that in worship. The way we are shaped in worship to become more Christ-like, to become more Christian, is one of the ways we can then be salt and

yeast when we are out in the world. Where we pray for the world in worship, where preparing for that journey and for that witness as well. So the need that worship has to look outside itself is very important.

There are churches who have very little in the way of intercession, prayer for the world. They might say they pray for others, but when you listen to what they do, they're actually praying for other members of their congregation.

That's a very important thing to do in worship but we also need, according to scripture, to pray for rulers and authorities. We need to pray for secular concerns, we need to pray for peace and justice, we need to pray for the world which isn't resembling God's kingdom; that it might be more like God's kingdom, and we do that in worship as well as elsewhere. And as we do it collectively that empowers us than when we are outside worship we are there not simply fitting in, we are there as people who have been shaped by the gospel of Christ.



Session 7: Learning from the Psalms

Bible Verses:

Psalm 139: 1-6

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.
You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, LORD, my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.
But I have calmed and quietened myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.
Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and for evermore.

Introduction:

The whole range of human emotion can be found in the Psalms, from praise and devotion, to fear, anger and lament. They provide us with scriptural words where we can express these emotions and bring them before God. What can we learn from the Psalms, and how can we use them today?

Watch the Video:

Session 7 can be viewed or downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw7



Questions:

Can you share your favourite Psalm? Why is it your favourite?

Do you find the Psalms as encouraging? What's your experience of the Psalms?

If you were to write a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving – what would you be saying?

How about a Psalm of anger and questioning – what aspects of life would be driving these questions?
Are there areas of your life that you are not bringing before God?

Chris talks about 'un-Christian' sections of the Psalms, particularly in relation to enemies. *"There are aspects of the emotion and the intent and the prayer that are part of some of the Psalms that we would say is contrary to what Christ has shown us and taught us."*

In our prayer life are there times when we ask for inappropriate things?

How might we bring the Psalms more into our lives?

Please share your reflections and feedback at: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw7

Transcript:

Ruth: *I've begun to really appreciate the Psalms, and I wonder if there's a place for when we're supposed to bring Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; for the psalms to be introduced. We use them to meditate on in groups during the week, which we've found to be highly missional. Maybe you could put some of those Psalms to music and some art with them in your spare time?*

Chris: The Psalms are a vitally important part of scripture for me. If I'm having to choose the bits I go to most, the Psalms are one of that. In terms of my shelf of commentaries, I've probably got more on the Psalms than any other part. That's partly because as a part of daily practice I want to read from the Psalms as part of my personal devotions. They provide so much variety from praise, to devotion, to lament to really questioning God about why things are as they are. There really is such a range of human emotion there, and they provide us with words that are scriptural words, where we can express those range of emotions and bring them to God.

R: *The Psalmists have a lot to teach us because they do bring the world with them into the presence of God. I wonder, for yourself, have there been times or particular Psalms that meant a lot to you in your personal worship life and deepening in your relationship with God?*

C: Yes, you said about people bring themselves, and the Psalmists bring themselves into the mix. I always remember reading Thomas Merton, who spoke about his becoming a monk, and how people thought that monks went into monasteries to get away from the world. And Merton simply comments: 'They take the world with them in their hearts.' We cannot be other than who we are. So even when we try and withdraw, we are bringing our social attitudes, our politics, our prejudices, our anxieties - all these things we are bringing with us. They are a part of what we are when we stand before God.

So however much we try to withdraw we're not actually withdrawing and we need to own up to it and face it. What the Psalms do, in a sense, is to draw some of those themes out.

There are parts of the Psalms that we wouldn't want to use as a prayer because they are un-Christian. Historically, they are pre-Christian - they were written hundreds of years before the time of Christ. But there are aspects of the emotion and the intent and the prayer that are part of some of the Psalms that we would say is contrary to what Christ has shown us and taught us - about what it says about our enemies. But as we read them it draws out and brings to the surface some of those things that we try to repress and ignore, that we need to face up to in order to offer them to God and ask God to deal with them.

R: *Are there echoes there for yourself? You talked earlier about the need to go deeper because life is throwing things at you and things are hard to cope with.*

C: In terms of particular Psalms, I can remember Psalm 139 which is about God's intimate knowledge of us. There is nowhere I can go where God won't be, there is nothing I can experience where God won't have been there first. Because he made me in my mother's womb.

I can remember trying to bring as much to mind as I could of that Psalm while flat on my back in an MRI scanner, with the horrible noises you have when you have that scan. It was this sense of somebody scrutinising my body. What I did was brought Psalm 139 to that. It's a psalm that I return to, one I will normally use in a funeral service. But at other times as well it has such power, because it's both about God's intimate knowledge of me, and yet God's mercy and understanding.



Session 8: Refreshment from God

Bible Verses:

Psalm 91

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge;

his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling,

no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

'Because he loves me,' says the Lord, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.

With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.'

1 Kings 19: 1-9

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night.

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 9:12

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill.

Introduction:

We often find that God works through our most difficult – and significant – moments. In loss or anxiety, awe or wonderment, when our own human resources seem incapable of making sense of what's happening, God is never more present. What impact does this have on our faith?

This session also explores that perennial issue, 'busyness', and the importance of stepping back and taking in.

Watch the Video:

Session 8 can be viewed or downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw8



Questions:

What moments in your life have caused you to go deeper in your experience of God?

Ruth speaks about *"Offering vulnerability as a strength"*, hitting a terribly difficult moment, reaching out to God, and now being able to share something of God with others in similar situations. Have there been instances where you can relate to this?

Chris quotes a speaker at his church saying: *"Remember in the dark what you learned in the light"* If you were to go in the dark tomorrow, what resources have you got? How would you cope? Where would you put your trust?

In what ways are you too busy? Do you find you justify yourself by your tasks, what you do and how busy you are? Are you robbing yourself, family and spirituality by being too busy? Do you take seriously the grace of God?

Do you build times into your life when you take in? What do you do? What are those times?

Please share your reflections and feedback at: www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw8

Transcript:

Ruth: *Chris, I know you helped me quite a lot at the beginning of my ministry which I came to through a degree of ill health having tried to burn the candle at both ends as a Primary School teacher and a lay preacher and leader and found myself needing more depth than I ever had in the 40 previous years as a Christian. Things that I learnt about contemplative prayer and the need for depth I know have really affected your life through times of ill health as well.*

Chris: Yes, I think that in some ways I'd put my ministry in two halves. That's not taking anything away from the first half, but there was something that had changed about 20 years into ministry, so you've got a way to go Ruth! I found myself in the early 1990s firstly seeking in a way that resulted in my going on a renewal journey, in which charismatic renewal was very important for me.

Within a year of the focus of that journey, I found myself having cancer surgery... and those two together were very significant because they interacted with one another.

The renewal journey gave me resources for facing up to and enduring and dealing with concerns about whether I had very long to live – it was very challenging. I was keeping, and still keep, a personal journal and I can remember, a few days after coming out of hospital, writing in my journal: 'I'm being tempered on the anvil of God's love', and 'God's hands are strong but they're rough.' I don't know the whys and wherefores of that cancer but it brought me to the place where life and death were very real and the journey that I had been on spiritually put me in a place where, by the grace of God, I felt I was able to go deeper.

I was able to go deeper because of my need and when I read the account of Jesus talking to the Pharisees and he says *"It's not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick"*, he's saying to them you are so complacent you don't think you have any needs, therefore I can't help you.

It's when we face our weaknesses and when we face the things that really stretch and challenge us, then we rely more upon God and then God has elbow-room in which to do things with us. These things aren't continuous: they will come maybe once or twice, but you feed on them, you go back to them and they renew you and God uses them again as you re-process them, and so continually we plan for the future and yet there's a sense in which the future is God's not ours, and there are things that you learn.

I can remember that the week before I went into hospital for surgery somebody was preaching in the church where I was Pastor, it was a church anniversary so I wasn't preaching that day. They quoted something that somebody had said to them in their ministry years before – a church member – *"Remember in the dark what you learned in the light"*. I took that with me into hospital and it remained very important for me and what I found afterwards was that that vulnerability and that weakness, and, in turn, that richness and strength which came from the grace of God, enriched my ministry in terms of how I was able to be alongside other people who were in similar situations of extremity afterwards. It doesn't provide you with the answers, but it puts you in a different place... and that place is where you are more reliant on God.

R: *That's why I'm so glad that you are taking the theme of Deeper, as well as Higher and Wider because I think I was very fortunate to come to ministry from a time of realising my own vulnerability and brokenness, because it meant I only offer vulnerability as a great strength, it's where God's strength is seen. Do you think this will help ministers who are trying to be everything and maybe something you can bring to ministry in general?*

C: Well I hope so and I think that 'Deeper' is a vital theme for ministers, because, well it's an important theme for everybody, but one of the things I'm aware of is that, certainly in my ministry, and I think in the ministry of other people as I look at them, there are times when they don't take seriously enough the grace of God. They preach the grace of God, but as I see people justifying themselves by showing how busy they are, I think 'Are we into works or are we into grace? Are we trying to justify our existence. Are we so insecure that we have to present an image of being very, very busy?' Or maybe, be very busy because we feel that's the only way we can justify our existence. And I've had to learn, and I want to encourage other people to learn, that we begin with the grace of God. That what we offer is not our own competence, what we offer is Christ.

R: *I can remember sitting with you in the very early days of my ministry and you being honest enough to explain to me the habits of your day and sitting and reading a book, and it gave me the licence really to say here's someone who's been before me, who's still surviving and has put some habits into his day that allow a little bit of rhythm, which I'm hoping through your presidential year you'll be able to share with lots of people, for a healthier church, really, as ministers realise the grace of God.*

C: What I don't want to do is run on empty and there has to be a balance; there has to be a place where I take in and that will include reading, it will include prayer and scripture, it will include fellowship with other people and learning from other people. These things are vital parts of what we might call spiritual disciplines, because what we can't offer people is just what we have. It has to be deeper than that. Deeper is an important theme. I still feel I am scratching the surface and there is so much more - and, boy, is that exciting!



Faith and Society Team, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Baptist House, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot OX11 8RT
Tel: 01235 517700 Email: faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk Website: www.baptist.org.uk

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