

A Trinitarian Theology of Worship How the Triune Nature of God Informs and Shapes Christian Worship

Even if the goal of theology is right worship and right living, understanding is not unimportant. ... growth in understanding and careful reflection on what happens when we pray or take communion will surely enrich and encourage our worship life. There is ample evidence for the barrenness that results from either unthinking practice or unengaged theology. – William Dyrness¹

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Dates: View seminar recordings April 22nd-May 5th 2025; attend Zoom discussions May 7, 12, 16 at 7:00 pm PDT; submit final assignment by May 23

Venue: Online

Description

Many of us equate worship with singing, but the biblical message is far more than this. Unfortunately, many churches fall into the trap of simply appointing a talented individual to take care of music on Sundays, without understanding key biblical and theological essentials about the church's worship. Consequently, worship can devolve into entertainment or looking to copy what seems to be the next 'big thing' in church growth. The result can be Christians who are *mis*-formed by the worship they participate in, developing self-centred approaches to worship, rather than a biblically informed, God-centred approach.

The first of a four-part series of micro-courses on worship arts theology and practice, this micro-course begins a journey of understanding the character of the Triune God we worship. It will help us define what God means when we use the word 'worship', how God is himself engaged with us in worship, and set a groundwork for what should take place when we come together (future modules). This series of micro-courses will help us think about how we unify our thoughts about Sunday worship, rather than live in the tensions that have divided us.

Student Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and Intellectual Formation (Cognitive Domain)

- Engage the Bible, Christian tradition, and interdisciplinary resources to analyze the Triune character of God, especially as it relates to Christian worship.

Practical Skills (Practical Domain)

- Analyze Christian worship services for ways in which the service either forms or mis-forms a Trinitarian understanding of God.

Character Formation (Affective Domain)

- Develop a deeper affection for God by discovering his heart for developing intimacy with his children.

¹ William Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go*, Kindle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009). Loc. 1883.

Required Resources

- Torrance, James B. *Worship, Community and The Triune God Of Grace*. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006.
- Dyrness, William. *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go*. Kindle. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009. (Chapter 4 – PDF provided)

Suggested Resources

- Van Dyk, Leanne, ed. *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony*. Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005. (Chapter 1)
- Ross, Allen. *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2006. Pages 418-425: The Essentials of Worship in the Early Church,

Assessment Tools

Live discussion dialogue: 40% of final grade

View seminar recordings and share questions/comments between April 22nd-May 5th, 2025
Attend live discussions May 7th, 12th, 16th at 7:00pm PDT.

Curious and constructive dialogue is integral to engaging with people in conversations about theological questions, so meaningful participation in live discussions is an essential part of this micro-credential offering. In terms of 'meaningful participation,' it means showing up to each of our meetings and speaking thoughtfully to the questions we explore with each other. If you can do that, you will receive full marks for this assessment component.

Following engagement with the recorded instruction videos, our micro-course cohort will meet online via Zoom three times (each meeting will be an hour and fifteen minutes), to discuss the content in semi-structured conversations guided by the instructor. Online meetings will generally assume the following format:

- 10-15 minutes: opening remarks, including outline of key themes/questions for discussion, provide by instructor
- 35-45 minutes: guided discussion
- 10-15 minutes: closing remarks, tying up of loose ends, by instructor

Term project: 40% of final grade

Submit by May 23, 2025

Length: 1500 words

This paper is for you to reflect on and interact with the lectures and readings by answering the following questions:

- What is your understanding of Trinitarian worship as presented?
- Why is this important for the spiritual formation of the believer?
- How does this aspect of biblical worship present itself in your current and past worship contexts?
- Are there segments of the greater Church in which you feel the aspects of Trinitarian worship are either compromised and/or lacking? If so, what are the dangers inherent in these practices?
- What are some ways that you would suggest churches can effectively encourage a Trinitarian understanding of God through their gathered worship?

Reading Review: 20% of final grade

Submit by May 23

Give a review of the text and the PDF reading, including an overview the main idea of what the author is trying to communicate, how he attempts to do that, and whether you believe he accomplished this. How did this impact your understanding of Trinitarian worship theology? **No more than 500 words for each resource.**

Recorded Seminars Outline

Session 1 – Defining Biblical Worship Introductions -

- What is worship?

- Why Study Worship Theology
- The Importance of worship
- Worship vs Missions: What's the Main point?
- **Forming a Biblical View of Worship**
 - Some definitions of worship
 - Some biblical examples of worship
 - Some biblical words for worship
 - Proskuneo – correct action
 - Phobos/Sebomai – correct attitude
 - Latreia/Avad – correct life response
 - Some scholarly definitions of biblical worship
- **Three influencing factors:**
 - How we view **God** will dictate how we view worship
 - How we view **ourselves** will dictate how we view worship
 - How we view **the Church** will dictate how we view worship

Session 2

- **Defining the Right Object of our worship Pt 1 - THEOCENTRIC worship**
 - Cultural views of worship
 - Common misconceptions of worship
 - Christian worship is not EGO-centric (self-centered)
 - Christian worship is not ANTHROPO-centric (people-centered)
 - Christian Worship is THEO-centric
 - Defining acceptable worship - Ps 24:3-4
 - Clean Hands (correct relationships)
 - Pure Heart (correct attitude)
 - Right View of God (correct object)
 - Forms of common idolatry
 - Idolatry of religion
 - Idolatry of self

Session 3

- **Defining the Right Object of our worship Pt 2 - CHRISTOCENTRIC worship**
 - Understanding the person of Jesus as the focus of our worship
 - What is Gospel-centered worship?
 - How we determine that Christ is the correct Object of our worship.
 - Ancient and modern heresies regarding Jesus
 - Christian Worship immerses us in the Gospel – the Story of God

Session 4

- **Defining the Right Object of our worship Pt 3 - Trinitarian worship**
 - What does 'Spirit-led' worship mean? John 4:24
 - Where does the Spirit lead us to? Into all truth ... about Jesus. John 16:13-14
 - Some heresies about the Holy Spirit and the Trinity
 - Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
 - OT ministry
 - NT ministry
 - How the Triune God is active in our worship (Trinitarian Worship)
 - Worship of the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.
 - Seeing worship as a relational call of the Triune God.

Resulting Academic Credit

This micro course leads to 1 hour of academic credit at Northwest. Usually this will be recognized with a "Letter of Completion" issued to document continuing education work. Completion of 3 Lifelong Learning micro courses in a three-part series (or 3 closely related topics), worth a total of 3 credit hours, may be applied to another Northwest competency-based credential such as the GAP Year, CCF, or possibly a Graduate Certificate.

If you are in or are thinking about enrolling in a CBTE program at Northwest, work you do for this micro course offering may be used for advanced standing in the following competencies:

Undergraduate

108. Consistently Worship God: 108.1: Use scripture and theology to define "worship" and assess how it affirmed and/or challenged your assumptions about the meaning and purpose of worship.

108. Consistently Worship God: 108.2: Explain why and how worship is a principal purpose of Christians and the church and why and how spiritual disciplines and practices help Christians and the church fulfill this purpose.

Graduate

702. Worship: competency 702.1: Have a growing, theologically robust understanding of worship that is the basis for a God-glorifying life

702. Worship: competency 702.2: Use the resources of scripture and theology to teach others why and in what ways worship of God defines the Christian life and the church

What are competencies?

A competency is an “I can...” statement about something to do with knowledge, skill, and/or character.

For example...

If you can say “I can recite Psalm 23 from memory,” that’s a knowledge competency.

If you can say, “I can preach a sermon on Psalm 23 in a way that honours the scriptural text and engages people in a transformative way,” that’s a skill competency.

If you can say, “Psalm 23 has helped transform my understanding of and relationship with God, and this has made me a more faithful follower of Jesus,” that’s a character competency.

And, to help you achieve competencies you cannot currently say “I can...” about, we provide you with resources and assignments to help you get to place where you can say, with confidence, “I can...”.

How are competencies developed and assessed?

You instructor(s) will provide you with assignments (see above) to help you develop competencies and show how that development has taken place. Those assignments will be assessed using the following rubric (which describes three different levels of competency):

Rubric	Description	Mentor Input
Exemplary	The learner has mastered this competency to the level that their performance is exceptional and could be relied upon to teach and supervise development of this competency in others.	14/14
Accomplished	The learner has invested significant time and effort to develop and demonstrate mastery of this competency to the degree that their skill and proficiency can be used as an aspirational reference point for others.	13/14
Proficient	The learner can be trusted to consistently and reliably demonstrate satisfactory mastery of this competency across diverse situations.	12/14
Insufficient	The learner does not yet meet the criteria for proficiency in this competency.	0/14

If your development of a competency is assessed as insufficient, you have as much time as you need to develop it. Your instructor(s) will give you focused feedback, suggestions, action items, etc. to help you in this development process.