



Worship Philosophy

Theology of Worship

WORSHIP IS THE MOTIVATION behind everything we do at The Austin Stone Community Church, and we believe worship is one of the fundamental things that every Christian is called to do. When we worship, we ascribe worth to something, and whether we realize it or not, we are always worshipping something or someone. We cannot help it. Human beings were created to worship.

So what does it look like to worship God? **Biblical worship is the full-life response—head, heart, and hands—to who God is and what He has done.**

1. **Worship Is a Response**—Biblical worship is a full-life response. Before the fall, we were primarily responders, with God as the actor displaying His love for us. We responded in worship. This is the intended order of things. Today, we attempt to be the actors, and we hope that others will respond to us. We act hoping to be thanked, seen as powerful or cool or whatever else we may be striving after, and we desire to be the object of worship rather than the worshipper. A worship leader's primary job is to shift people's focus from trying to be the object to worshipping the Creator and King of everything.
2. **Worship Is Our Whole Life**—Even when we are not directing our worship at ourselves, we direct it to other things. Matt Chandler writes in his book *The Explicit Gospel* that during March Madness, with victory comes elation and with defeat comes destitution. Before each game there is a nervousness in our stomachs, and after each one there are hours spent going over

the details. He writes, "Every bit of that passion was given to us by God for God. It was not given for basketball ... Where is the elation over the resurrection? Where is the desolation over our sins? ... It's on basketball. It's on football. It's on romance."¹ We must make God the object of our worship, not other things.

3. **Worship Is More than Music**—We do not worship only through music. Worship is much more than that. Our entire lives should be acts of worship. A worship leader is not simply leading a congregation in song, but rather, the worship leader is directing their daily lives.

As a worship ministry, we want to lead people to worship the living God, rather than anything else this world or life has to offer. While we are all tempted to worship many things that are not God—money, status, man, creation—biblical worship turns our affections toward God. And in that, Jesus is glorified, and we find Him to be the true treasure of our lives.

1. Matt Chandler, *The Explicit Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 51.

Cultural Foundations

The Word

We believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God and that it must be central in everything that we do. We lead, serve, counsel, and pastor our people according to what God has revealed to us and commanded us in His Word.

The purpose and aim of Sunday liturgies, from beginning to end, is to saturate each congregation in the Word of God. Both the first set of songs and the call to worship are centered on Scripture, pointing to the specific message to be preached that day. The response songs after the sermon are a direct response to the Word of God that was preached. Every song led from the stage must be not only theologically and scripturally accurate but also selected to point to and respond to the Word of God proclaimed that Sunday. In addition to a scriptural call to worship and theologically rich songs, it is essential that our worship leaders be theologians.

Engagement

The worship culture at The Austin Stone is one of engagement. Our desire is for our people to be fully engaged in corporate worship every single week. Consistency in leadership, accessible melodies and arrangements, contextualized music style, and approachable personalities on stage all help to foster this atmosphere of engagement. We would rather include fewer familiar songs in our rotation than have too many new, unfamiliar songs in any given semester.

We believe that worship leaders must be fully engaged every week in serving, praying for, and shepherding our congregations. Green rooms are reserved only for preparation and study before services. During every single service, worship leaders and musicians are to be present in the first few rows, fully engaged in the entire service. Additionally, there should be a deep sense of engagement from our staff in the hallways, in the worship environments, and in the life of our city and church.

Expressive Worshippers

For us to create a culture of expressive worshippers, leadership at The Austin Stone must lead out in being expressive worshippers. Because so much of communication is nonverbal, physical posture and countenance is one of the most important things for our pastors, congregation teams, worship leaders, and staff to consider as we lead our church toward expressive corporate worship. As a staff, we want to show our brothers and sisters what it looks like to enjoy worshipping God. This is why we hope every worship gathering is full of joy, passion, loud singing, and expressive outward postures that reflect the inward posture of a heart fully surrendered to God.

Excellence

There is a difference between worldly and godly excellence. Perfectionism in ministry is unhealthy and dangerous to the heart, as it lends itself to performance rather than honesty. Ministry driven by achievement leads to greed and the pursuit of applause and approval. Competitive ministry is tiresome and driven by the desire to be the best.

But godly excellence in ministry is all-together different, valuable, and good! In Scripture, the call to excellence is much richer than awards or achievements. The godly view of excellence is much different than the worldly view of excellence. We see this in the book of Philippians: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8).

The words describing excellence—true, honorable, just, pure, lovely and commendable—are the essence of God Himself. He is the very definition of excellence. Therefore, our pursuit of excellence is not one of selfish gain or perfection, but one that points to Jesus. We seek to be obedient to Christ when He calls us in Matthew 5 to “... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

For those leading worship from the stage, several components to a culture of excellence in worship are essential. The culture begins with theologically rich and engaging song writing. Musicians also should be paid for their time and talents, and bands must rehearse weekly. Many dedicated volunteers are needed, and superb audio is necessary at each campus for a culture of excellence to form.

Togetherness

Because it is vital for those leading from the stage to be solid leaders, musicians, and believers, Austin Stone Worship (ASW) fosters a culture of togetherness. God does not intend for His people to go through life alone. We need each other—the community of saints. This is what drives togetherness in ASW.

A chandelier is made up of many seemingly insignificant lights. But when the chandelier is connected to the source of power and the lights work together in unison, it creates a beautiful, ornate piece of art that uses light to drive out darkness. ASW seeks to be a collection of lights that can be seen from afar, illuminating the hills and valleys below. It is a high calling to walk in humility, love, obedience to the Father, and submission to each other, with the aim of together being that light that drives out darkness.

Some components of togetherness within Austin Stone Worship include gatherings like team retreats, Worship Huddle, and Worship Collective. ASW also seeks to co-write, be band-centric, and create a collaborative culture of the priesthood.

Development

Development is a driving value in the worship ministry at The Austin Stone. We believe that God calls worship leaders to shepherd people toward Him. Because of that calling, we seek to sharpen worship leaders in shepherding on stage through leading songs with theological precision, as well as off stage in pastoring and discipling their people.

An adage for development at The Austin Stone is to “use tasks to get people done, not people to get tasks done.” Our desire is to utilize the entire worship ministry at The Austin Stone as a platform to develop individuals. The bar is set high, and the team atmosphere ensures that there is always an element of encouragement, collaboration, and excellence. Worship leaders are developed at The Austin Stone through residencies, the Worship Leader Development Program, musician development, audio engineer development, digital resources, and constructive feedback.