

THE 
PRESENT
WORD
ADULT BIBLE LESSONS

PARTICIPANT'S BOOK

WINTER 2019-2020

HONORING GOD

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PARTICIPANT'S BOOK

HONORING GOD

Introduction	iv
The Uniform Series	v
Quarter in Brief	vi

Unit I: David Honors God

1. December 1	David Worships God in Jerusalem	1
	<i>1 Chronicles 15</i>	
2. December 8	A Heart Filled with Gratitude	7
	<i>1 Chronicles 16:7–36</i>	
3. December 15	Building God's House	13
	<i>1 Chronicles 17:1–15; 21:18–20</i>	
4. December 22	The Lord Is with You	19
	<i>Luke 1:39–56</i>	
5. December 29	David's Prayer	25
	<i>1 Chronicles 17:16–27</i>	

Unit II: Dedicating the Temple of God

6. January 5	A Place for the Ark	31
	<i>1 Kings 8:1–13; 2 Chronicles 5:1–14</i>	
7. January 12	Solomon's Speech	37
	<i>1 Kings 8:14–21; 2 Chronicles 6</i>	
8. January 19	Solomon's Dedication Prayer	43
	<i>1 Kings 8:22–53; 2 Chronicles 6:12–42</i>	
9. January 26	Solomon's Blessing	49
	<i>1 Kings 8:54–66</i>	

Unit III: Jesus Teaches about True Worship

10. February 2	Single-minded Obedience	55
	<i>Matthew 4:1–11</i>	
11. February 9	Piety That Honors God	61
	<i>Ecclesiastes 5:1–6; Matthew 6:1–8</i>	
12. February 16	The Prayer of Jesus	67
	<i>Matthew 6:9–15</i>	
13. February 23	Perseverance in Prayer	73
	<i>Luke 11:1–13</i>	
	About the Writer/Coming Next Quarter	79

Introduction

Welcome to the winter quarter of *The Present Word*, a study of personal and corporate expressions of worship. We begin our study with King David, known as “a man after God’s own heart.” David is a strong example of a spiritual leader who worships God in his own life but who also takes bold measures to ensure Israel’s right worship as prescribed in God’s holy covenant.

On December 22, the fourth Sunday of Advent, we look at worship through the eyes of Mary’s Song in Luke 1. Her worshipful song of thanksgiving and praise is reminiscent of many of the Hebrew psalms attributed to David.

In January 2020, we explore worship through the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. While David put all the plans in place for constructing a house for God, it was his son Solomon whom God ordained to complete the work.

In February, we join the disciples to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from his teaching on honoring God through our worship.

I pray that your exploration of worship through the stories of Israel’s celebrations of gratitude to God under King David and King Solomon and the discipleship lessons of King Jesus will lead you to incline your heart to our God, who is compassionate, faithful, and gracious.

In Christ,

Mark D. Hinds,
Editor

The Uniform Series

The Present Word quarterly Bible study is based on the Uniform Series, a plan for reading and studying the Bible. The objectives of the series are to help persons increasingly:

1. to know the content of the Bible,
2. to understand the message of the Bible in light of their experiences and relationships, and
3. to be aware of God's self-disclosure, especially God's redeeming love as revealed in Jesus Christ, that they may respond in faith and love—to the end that they may know who they are and what their human situation means, grow as the children of God rooted in the Christian community, live in the Spirit of God in every relationship, fulfill their common discipleship in the world, and abide in the Christian hope.

The emphasis in these objectives is on the Bible as the record of the revelation of God in Christ as the primary source of understanding the meaning of the Christian faith and as the most effective means of confronting persons with the significant concerns of the gospel. These concerns include personal faith, values, human relationships, social responsibility, Christian hope, and the implications of Christian discipleship under the lordship of Christ and in the fellowship of his Spirit.

One of the distinctive features of the Uniform Series is the collaborative process through which denominational partners engage in the common task of developing the Lesson Guides. The development process begins with a Scope and Sequence subcommittee whose work sets a framework for the biblical themes of each six-year cycle. The Scope and Sequence team for Cycle 23 (2016–2022) chose themes that are creatively expressed in this statement of Christian faith:

The God of the Bible, the source of creation, loves us and calls us in covenant through our faith to worship and to do justice.

The underlined words in the statement compose the eight recurring themes throughout each quarterly segment of *The Present Word*.

Quarter in Brief

The winter quarter explores ways of honoring God through worship. The Old Testament lessons recall how David and Solomon honored God by establishing the center of worship in Jerusalem and building the Temple. The New Testament lessons focus on Jesus' teachings about right attitudes that honor God through worship.

Unit I, "David Honors God," has five lessons: four from 1 Chronicles and one from Luke. The first three lessons are from 1 Chronicles and tell about David's bringing the ark to Jerusalem, leading the people in offering a psalm of thanksgiving, and planning to build a house for God. Lesson 4, the Christmas lesson, considers Mary's visit to Elizabeth as found in Luke. Lesson 5 returns to 1 Chronicles and David's prayer of gratitude for God's promise of a dynasty.

Unit II, "Dedicating the Temple of God," has four lessons that explore Solomon's dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings. Solomon honors God by providing a place for the ark, by offering blessings to God for fulfilling the promise to David, by praying that God would hear prayers offered in the Temple, by calling the people to keep God's commandments, and by offering sacrifices to God.

Unit III, "Jesus Teaches about True Worship," has four lessons that explore what Jesus says about honoring God through one's spiritual practices. Matthew points to right attitudes in obeying God only and in honoring God in almsgiving and in prayer. The prayer of Jesus provides a comprehensive life approach in honoring God. Luke teaches about perseverance in prayer to honor God.

DAVID WORSHIPS GOD IN JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

1 Chronicles 15

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres. (1 Chron. 15:28)

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. Most congregations have been feverishly preparing for this season of worship. A sense of heightened anticipation fills the air as special preparations are being made to celebrate the coming of Christ.

Heightened anticipation underscores the over-the-top celebration that David engineers to welcome the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. The ark was a visible sign of God's presence, a sacred container holding the tablets received by Moses at Mt. Sinai. The tablets held the commandments by which they were to order their worship of God and their lives together. The ark served as the ritual center of Israel, a symbol of God amid the people wherever they traveled.

The ark had been captured as spoils of war when Israel's first king, Saul, was defeated by the Philistines. The loss of the symbol of God's presence and guidance was devastating. We join the story as David sets his sights on bringing the ark to Jerusalem. This is the cornerstone for David's kingship, setting up Jerusalem as the central, sacred space for Israel's worship. In doing so, David will firmly join Israel's future with the long history of God's covenant people.

O God, in this season of Advent preparation and waiting, open our hearts to you, the heart of our worship. Make us mindful of how we can follow you, seeking your own heart. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Chron. 15:1–3, 14–16, 25–29a

15:1 David built houses for himself in the city of David, and he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. ²Then David commanded that no one but the Levites were to carry the ark of God, for the LORD had chosen them to carry the ark of the LORD and to minister to him forever. ³David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the LORD to its place, which he had prepared for it. . . .

¹⁴So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹⁵And the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD.

¹⁶David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kindred as the singers to play on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds of joy. . . .

²⁵So David and the elders of Israel, and the commanders of the thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the house of Obed-edom with rejoicing. ²⁶And because God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams. ²⁷David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as also were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the leader of the music of the singers; and David wore a linen ephod. ²⁸So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres.

²⁹As the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing.

Scripture Notes

In contrast to the first attempt to move the ark to Jerusalem, David took complete charge of the second, successful attempt, personally enforcing the Torah regulations that only Levites could carry the ark (1 Chron. 15:2).

David's active concern for and participation in the installation of the ark stands in direct opposition to Saul's neglect (1 Chron. 13:3).

While the ark would later reside in the Temple, this building would be built by David's son Solomon after he ascended the throne (2 Chron. 3).

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

The ark of the covenant first appears in Exodus 25:10–22, described as a chest made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. It held Israel’s most sacred treasures. Hebrews 9:1–4 says that the ark held the tablets of the Law, Aaron’s rod, and a jar of manna. However, other passages claim that the ark held only the tablets. The ark of the covenant was the symbol of God’s presence. The Israelites regarded the ark as the throne of God.

The ark had four rings of gold through which carrying poles were inserted. The poles were never removed from the rings so that the carriers never touched the ark. The Hebrews carried the ark during their years in the wilderness. Eventually, it was enshrined at Shiloh in a tabernacle (a semipermanent tent) when they settled at Canaan. The ark was a mobile, present reminder of God’s promises and presence.

Chosen to follow Saul as Israel’s king, David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). David learned the hard way that when it comes to handling the ark, following instructions mattered. As David knew, only the priestly Levites were to carry the ark. (Levites were members of the priestly tribe of Levi, the tribe of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.) During the first attempt to move the ark, an unfortunate accident occurred. The oxen pulling the cart that held the sacred container “shook” the ark. And who should reach out to steady the holy vessel? Not a Levite but the unfortunate Uzzah, who was struck dead by a highly displeased God (1 Chron. 13:9–11).

God patiently waited for David to prove anew that he was ready to try again. David made a second set of preparations, doing his best to avoid any false moves. He used this second chance to include everyone—priests and ordinary people alike—in jubilant worship intended to offer joyful praise and thanksgiving for God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. This public ceremony squarely aligned David’s reign and power with God in Jerusalem, the city David captured and set up as the holy city and capital of all Israel. Giving the ark a permanent home in Jerusalem was more than a symbolic move. It was, as David and the Chronicler see it, an obedient one.

? The ark was the symbol of God’s presence and considered to be God’s throne. What objects in your church sanctuary symbolize God’s presence in that place? How would the absence of that object affect the spiritual health of your congregation?

JOYFUL WORSHIP

David went with the ark in a spirit of joyful worship. David, a gifted musician, encouraged the musicians to praise God with their instruments as he danced joyfully before the ark. The precedent for worshiping with dance was set by Miriam and her women who danced over the rescue of the Hebrews from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Exod. 15). Dance was an integral part of Israel's worship.

David was not only praising God on his own behalf; he was also setting an example for the congregation by involving everyone in praise. Notice that the celebration going with the ark's entrance into Jerusalem included "all Israel." It also included a clearly defined cast of characters with parts to play. They were well-prepared, no doubt rehearsing their parts to lead worship in an honorable way, according to the prescribed religious practices. The procession included instrumental and vocal music, dancing, ceremonial attire, and ritual sacrifices. There was a place for everyone.

Where did David's ideas for "right worship" come from? A quick look at Psalm 95, which functions as a call to worship and obedience, reveals one good description of worship:

O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! (vv. 1-2)

Psalm 100, with its invitation to worship, is yet another:

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his presence with singing. . . .

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise. (vv. 1-2, 4)

Psalms 148, 149, and 150 entreat not only humankind but all creation to take part in everlasting, exuberant worship. David's worship planning was based on history and tradition, staged in such a way to make a theological claim: the restoration of worship at the center of the community's life is an essential expression of its obedience to God and is necessary for the survival of God's people.

? Have there been times when you wanted to get up during a church service and dance? What caused the feeling?


WHAT IT MEANS FOR US

David looked to set up right and honorable worship in Jerusalem, even before a permanent structure could be erected in which to conduct it. He understood the importance of following the rules governing worship, learning the hard way sometimes that there are good reasons for doing so, even if the rules seem a bit arcane and cumbersome. He also understood the role that ritual and symbol played in uniting a people to a shared vision and cause.

The inclusion of all Israel was not by accident. If David was to rule God's people, all God's people needed to be involved in the first procession that brought the ark of the covenant home and into the center of Israel's worship. Specific roles were assigned for reasons that could be explained based on the Law. Nothing was left to chance. Even food preparation—for sacred ritual and to feed the scores of people who took part—had a place in the plans. What group of church folk can gather for long without breaking bread together?

The importance of worship in the Christian education and spiritual formation of the people of God cannot be underestimated. The time spent in worship can be a productive instructional time. In many congregations, it is the only time that children of God of all ages, stages, and abilities gather together on a regular basis. What we do in worship, how we do it, and who takes part show whether all people are welcome and valued. If a congregation is focused only on words and neglects art, movement, or music, they are missing opportunities for worshipers to share their gifts. If the worship space is not welcoming for those who cannot see or hear, it will discourage them from engaging in worship.

The phrase “worship wars” crops up in conversations when people have strong, often differing opinions about what constitutes “right” worship. First Chronicles 15 and 16 offer clues to what right worship is. It involves everyone, sharing their gifts in joyful thanksgiving and praise. It is noisy and may even last for more than an hour. It takes planning, with room for the Holy Spirit to inspire those gathered to leap and dance and shout for joy. God is at the center of it all, with God's people acknowledging God's everlasting, steadfast love.

 **Review an order of worship from your congregation's worship service and notice who is involved in the service. Do you know of others who helped prepare for worship? Who is missing?**

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	Dec. 2	All Nations Invited to Worship God	Isa. 45:20–25
T	Dec. 3	Response to God’s Generosity	Deut. 26:1–11
W	Dec. 4	God’s Saving Deeds	Ps. 105:1–15
T	Dec. 5	God’s Gracious Compassion	Ps. 106:40–48
F	Dec. 6	God’s Forever Covenant	1 Chron. 16:14–18
S	Dec. 7	God’s Forever Steadfast Love	1 Chron. 16:28–36

DEVOTIONAL READING

Deut. 26:1–11

26:1 When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, “Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.” ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵you shall make this response before the LORD your God: “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.” You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.