HANDOUT · LEADERS & WORSHIPPERS

Returning to Belovedness!

Our ministry was never meant to replace our worship. It was always meant to flow from it.

Introduction

When we are busy leading, it is possible to serve God with all our hearts and still lose touch with God Himself. The drift seldom happens all at once. It comes so gradually that most of us don't notice until we feel far away. This handout invites us to be honest about how that happens, and to let the Holy Spirit gently draw us back to our one true identity: **we are known and loved first.** Personal worship and devotion are what keep us living in that place.

THE CORE MEANING OF BELOVEDNESS

- **Definition:** from the word *beloved*, it is the condition of being deeply loved, cherished and treasured by someone else; being held in great affection and regard.
- **Related words:** endearment, fondness, tenderness, warmth, being prized.
- **For followers of Christ:** our core identity is to be loved by God without condition. We do not earn it by behaviour, work or status. It is given to us freely by His grace.
- **The link:** how much we enjoy this undeserved place of belovedness is directly tied to our personal worship and devotion.

Ephesians 5:1-2
As God's dearly loved children, we are to imitate Him and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us.

1 John 4:19
Our love is a response: we love because He loved us first.

From serving *to be* loved …

… to serving *because* we are loved.

The heart shift at the centre of this message

1 Devotion through personal worship

2 Recognizing the drift

3 Rooted worship transforms service

4 Worship as a weapon

1 Getting Back to the Core Value of Devotion Through Personal Worship

We will all drift at some point, but a fresh start is available every day. It is a choice, and it takes intention. Devotion is not an extra activity. It is the core value that keeps everything else alive.

WHY WORSHIP MATTERS, INSIDE AND OUT

- **It shapes us.** The presentation cites research highlighted by neuroscientist Dr. Andrew Newberg. It suggests that around 12 minutes a day of prayer and worship strengthens the part of the brain linked to empathy, compassion, emotional regulation and moral reasoning. The same research says it calms the brain's fear and stress responses, with benefits such as lower cortisol and blood pressure.
- **Praise completes enjoyment.** C.S. Lewis noticed that whatever people enjoy, they naturally praise: scenery, games, food, people. In his view, praise does more than express our delight; it completes it. Worship is where our enjoyment of God becomes full.
- **We were made for this.** The Westminster Shorter Catechism says our chief purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
- **Everyone worships something.** We become what we worship, so it matters what we put at the centre.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- **Find your sound.** Discover the style of worship music that reaches your soul for your private time with God.
- **Build a playlist** on Spotify or Apple Music, and worship as soon as you wake up. It sets the tone for the whole day.
- **Use simple aids,** such as long worship sets on YouTube or a free daily worship app, for example Worship Initiative's "Come Sing With Me Today".
- **Make a daily rhythm,** alone or with a spouse or friend. A guide like *Lectio 365* can help keep it steady through life's storms.
- **Live what you teach.** Let the "lifestyle of a worshipper" be your own daily practice and not only something you teach.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is personal worship the foundation of my day, or does it fit in around everything else?

2. What kind of worship most readily brings my heart back to God?

3. What one daily habit could I start this week to anchor myself in devotion?

2 How to Recognize the Drift When Your Heart Has Shifted

Busy church activity and real intimacy with God can look exactly the same from the outside. Drift usually begins in the heart, at the level of identity, long before it shows in behaviour. The speaker describes a season of leading worship every week. Sets and rehearsals took over, and a much-loved calling began to feel mechanical and clinical. God's

presence and anointing still came, and people's lives were still touched, but inside there was distance. God had not moved. A heart check showed plenty of spiritual activity but very little time simply resting in Abba's presence.

> **Matthew 15:8**
> Jesus spoke of people who honour God with their words while their hearts are far from Him. He was speaking to people surrounded by faith, which means we can look spiritual on the outside while drifting inside. *See also Proverbs 29:18: we need fresh revelation and guidance from God's Word.*

WARNING SIGNS OF DRIFT

- **The Word only feeds others.** We read Scripture only to prepare sermons or sets, and it stops feeding us.
- **Prayer and worship become optional extras.** They stop being the bedrock and only come out in a crisis. We are too busy with His work to answer His invitation to "come to Me" (Matthew 11:28; John 5:40).
- **Conviction gets quieter and compromise gets easier.** Image becomes more important than what is happening in the heart. Brennan Manning warns that a self-image built on other people's applause is not our true self.
- **We are pulled into isolation.** We hide from the people who keep us accountable. Others begin to irritate us, and we build a case against them to justify keeping our distance.
- **There is lots of activity and little presence.** Routine and religious practice replace intimacy. Dryness, self-reliance and constant rushing dull our sense of God's presence.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- **Do a regular heart check.** Ask honestly: "Am I close to God right now? Has activity replaced intimacy?" Even if you don't think you have drifted, check anyway.
- **Keep a secret place.** Have a sacred space, physical or imagined, where you simply sit at His feet as His child. The speaker pictures Tollymore Forest in Ireland.
- **Stay connected.** Move toward the people who ask you the right questions, not away from them.
- **Practise noticing God** through mindfulness and gratitude. Look for His presence in creation and in ordinary moments.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When did I last sit at His feet just as His child, with nothing to prepare?

2. Which of the five warning signs do I recognise in my own life right now?

3. Who in my life is allowed to ask me hard questions, and am I letting them?

3 How Being Rooted in Worship Transforms How We Serve

In his book *Rooted*, Banning Liebscher tells of a Sunday when he sat anxiously in the front row, praying only that his sermon wouldn't go badly. He sensed God giving him a choice: be a preacher, and be good on some days and not on others, or be a son, and be secure every day. He chose to be a son. He still wants to preach and lead well, but that is no longer what drives him. What he longs to hear from Jesus is not "great preacher" but "great son".

Serving *to be* loved: performance, people-pleasing, seeking validation

Serving *because* we are loved: secure, free, joyful

Our service does not prove our worth. We are made worthy by the cross.

Brennan Manning's *Abba's Child* is the speaker's go-to book for a reset, read at least five times. It acts like a mirror that prompts the question **"Am I in good spiritual health?"** Manning's challenge is to *"define yourself radically as one beloved by God"*. Every other identity is an illusion. He describes the "Abba experience" as the greatest gift he ever received.

Romans 8:14-16

Those led by the Spirit are God's children. We did not receive a spirit that makes us fearful slaves. We received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry "Abba, Father", and the Spirit confirms that we belong to God.

John 1:12 · 1 John 3:1

Everyone who receives Christ is given the right to become God's child. The Father has lavished His love on us so that we are called His children, and that is what we are.

We have been given the power to become children, but we can stall in the *becoming*. The enemy's great lie is that we are too unworthy for this kind of intimacy.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- **Before you serve, receive.** Spend time as a son or daughter before you step into any role.
- **Notice your motives.** When anxiety about performance or approval rises, put it down and remember whose you are.
- **Find a "mirror" resource,** such as a book like *Abba's Child*, and come back to it whenever you need a reset.
- **Speak your identity** out loud: "I am Abba's beloved child."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Am I serving to be loved, or because I am loved? How can I tell?

2. Where do people-pleasing or performance still drive my ministry?

3. What would change if I saw myself first as a son or daughter, not a role?

4 The Power That Warfare Has in Worship When Overcoming Spiritual Attacks, and How Worship Is One of Our Most Powerful Weapons

The speaker tells how, through countless life battles, getting up off the floor and choosing to worship Jesus has brought a breakthrough every time. Worship is one of our most powerful weapons. It changes the atmosphere, stirs up resilience and is the key to overcoming.

WHAT WORSHIP DOES IN THE BATTLE

- **It enthrones God above the crisis.** When we lift Him up, fear, anxiety and darkness lose their grip.
- **It surrenders the fight to Him.** We let go of the need to control, and the Lord fights for us.
- **It silences the enemy's lies.** Psalm 8 pictures even little children's songs drowning out the enemy's talk. Worship restores right thinking.
- **It breaks through.** At Jericho, trumpets and shouts of praise brought down walls that seemed impossible.
- **It raises our faith.** It reminds us that the victory is already won and lines up our perspective with heaven's.

Psalm 22:3
God is enthroned on the praises of His people.

2 Chronicles 20:15-17
The battle belongs to God. Take your position, stand firm and watch the Lord deliver you.

Acts 16:16-34
Paul and Silas were beaten, chained and jailed for setting a girl free from a demon. They could have sunk into discouragement and self-pity. Instead, at midnight, they sang praises to God. The presentation notes that their songs were likely the ancient hymns of Psalms 113-118 and 136, declarations of God's faithfulness handed down through generations. Their praise and prayer brought divine intervention: the prison was shaken and they were set free.

Romans 8:37
In Christ we are more than conquerors. Worship places us in that position of victory.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- **Make worship your first response** when an attack comes, before you worry, analyse or try to fix it.
- **Sing the declarations of Scripture.** Use the Psalms as your battle songs, as Paul and Silas did.
- **Choose worship at your "midnight"**, even when you feel you have no strength left.
- **Hand the battle over.** In worship, let go of control and trust God to fight for you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What battle am I facing right now that I need to answer with worship instead of worry?

2. Which lies of the enemy most need to be drowned out by praise in my life?

3. What would my own "midnight song" be?

Key Scriptures at a Glance

Reference	Theme in this message
Ephesians 5:1-2	Imitating God as beloved children and walking in Christ's love
1 John 4:19	We love because He loved us first
Matthew 15:8	Honouring God with our lips while our hearts are far away: the sign of drift
Romans 8:14-16	The Spirit of adoption: we cry "Abba, Father"
Psalm 22:3	God is enthroned on His people's praises
2 Chronicles 20:15-17	The battle is the Lord's
Acts 16:16-34	Paul and Silas's midnight praise brings deliverance
Romans 8:37	More than conquerors in Christ

Also referenced: Proverbs 29:18 · Matthew 11:28 · John 5:40 · John 1:12 · 1 John 3:1 · Psalm 8 · Psalms 113-118, 136

ANCHORED IN OUR TRUE IDENTITY

Each of the four points does the same work: it anchors us in our true identity as God's beloved. Come back to devotion, notice the drift, serve from love rather than for love, and use worship as a weapon. Let worship turn your eyes again to God's power, His greatness, His majesty, and His love for you.

MY NEXT STEP

One thing I will do this week to return to belovedness: