seven words of WORSHIP
The Key to a Lifetime of Experiencing GOD
mike harland and stan moser
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True worship flows from the heart in recognition of and response to the magnificence of Christ and because of an understanding of the grace found solely in the gospel. Embracing these truths through the practical experience of daily living is the key to God sending a desperately needed revival to a spiritually drifting evangelical church. It is imperative that we get this right.

Mike Harland and Stan Moser understand this reality, and they want others to understand it too, which is why I am excited about this book. It would be true to say that these two godly men are vocationally dedicated to the pursuit of meaningful worship, but to stop there would be to shortchange the work of God in their lives. Yes, they both have made important contributions through their gifts and passions for the local church, the Christian music industry, and in the area of worship music. But all that aside, they are fueled not by music in and of itself but by hearts tuned to passionate pursuit and worship of the Savior. Worship of God is woven into the fabric of their lives, and they have a passion for others to experience a deep abiding relationship with God that erupts in worshipping Him both individually and corporately for His glory.

As Christians, we do not exist to revel each Sunday in our pomp and finery. Our lives should be as worshippers of Almighty God lived as a poured-out fragrant offering before the throne. Mike and Stan eloquently and with simplicity and biblical faithfulness explain the reality of what it means to live a life as a worshipper.
There are two primary reasons we exist: to worship God and to make His name known among the nations. My prayer is that God will use Seven Words of Worship as a resource to draw each reader to a deeper understanding of true worship that, in turn, leads each person to a desire to see Christ exalted among the nations that the world’s peoples might know the joy of worship as well.

—Thom S. Rainer
President and CEO
LifeWay Christian Resources
When the invitation came, I was absolutely certain that I wasn’t ready. To be honest with you, it just didn’t make any sense to my natural mind. Somehow, some way, I was supposed to write a book on experiencing God in worship.

I spent most of the day arguing with God. Surely He was calling the wrong guy this time. Don’t get me wrong; a book to encourage and empower people to experience God in worship certainly is a good idea. After all, most of us want a deeper encounter with God, don’t we? Well, at least we like the idea.

I told God that He really should invite some well-known author, worship leader, or eloquent speaker to take on the task. In fact, I spent quite a bit of time that day mulling over the list of prominent worship leaders who would be perfect for the job. Yes, that was it: I could plant the idea for this book with one of them, and they would jump at the opportunity.

I went to bed that night quite confident that I had found the solution. I had spent my entire adult life working with the most prominent artists, writers, and communicators in the church today. All I had to do was “help God” find the right one. What a relief.

The alarm went off at 5:00 a.m.—not the one on the nightstand, but the one in my head. I didn’t hear an audible voice, but God’s command was quite clear, “Get up and write.” Now that may sound strange to you. But I’ve “heard” that voice before, and I knew it was crucial to respond.
Before long I was sitting in the living room, yellow pad in hand, and seven words came to mind. I wrote them down. Frankly, they are pretty common words—creation, love, grace, response, expression, presence, and experience. Not terribly inspiring words on the surface, but absolutely life-changing words when put in context.

As the Lord linked them together over the next hour, I began to realize that these simple words just might be the key that allows many ordinary people like you and me to experience God in new and powerful ways. That simple message just might be the key to unlocking a new level of freedom in worship allowing us to become “portals of His presence” to those around us. That these seven words just might be the keys to a lifetime of experiencing God.

One year later, when I met Mike Harland, God made it clear that he was indeed that “well-known worship leader and speaker” who would help bring these words of worship to life for you and me. I assure you, Mike’s insights and life experiences will inspire you to pursue a worship lifestyle and experience God in your own life like never before.

If there is that place of longing and hunger for more of God’s presence in your life—this book is for you. If you are one who really does want to worship God in spirit and in truth, but you aren’t sure what that means—this book is for you.

God has promised His presence when we worship Him. He wants you to break through the doubts and traditions that have held you back. And He is ready to break in to every broken place in your life. It really is that simple: God inhabits the praises of His people. And when the King is present, all things are possible.

So come with expectation as you read. Look diligently into God’s Word with us, and you will see His face—you will know His presence. These seven simple words really can be your keys to a lifetime of experiencing God in worship. The time for your break through is right now. This invitation is for you.

—Stan Moser
When I came to LifeWay nearly three years ago, I had a burning mission in my heart and a recurring prayer. “God, favor my work so that I can share the message about worship You have put in my heart.” I didn’t know then, nor do I know now, all the ways God will answer that prayer. But I believe one of those ways is this book, Seven Words of Worship.

I will be forever grateful for my friend and coauthor Stan Moser for the energy and insights he brought to this message. It is amazing how God brought us together from such different experiences; yet we found unity and agreement around this message. Only God’s Word can do that and I give God glory for that unity.

My desire for this project is that it will turn your focus away from us, away from music, and even away from worship itself. Let me explain:

I have often told my choirs and churches that if people left our services saying, “What an awesome choir” or “That’s a great church,” then we have failed in our mission. No, the only thing I want said is, “What an awesome God!”

I feel the same way about this book. If all you get here is an impression of this book and the two authors, or even the message of worship it contains, then we have failed. I am concerned whenever I hear someone say, “You ought to experience the worship at our church—it’s awesome!” I’m afraid when we say that, we reveal that our worship is the point. This book is not about experiencing worship, it’s about experiencing God. If we do that, our worship will be the natural result.

If there is anything of eternal value here, it is because of the eternal value of God’s Word.

I give Him glory for who He is and what He has done in my life, and I thank Him for my wife, Teresa, and our children, Lee, Elizabeth, and John, who have shown me so much love.

—Mike Harland
Introduction

But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him. (John 4:23)

There is a deep and growing interest in worship these days, and that makes perfect sense. After all, worship is the primary reason we come together as the body of Christ each week. We gather to focus our attention and energy on giving glory to God; and when we do, we encounter God in powerful, life-changing ways. We are challenged and empowered to join God as He works in the world.

There are many forms of worship and certainly many different styles of worship. The body of Christ is a broad, diverse family, and the forms of our worship can often cause confusion and division. God is never the author of confusion, and His Word gives clear guidelines that empower and liberate all believers in their worship expressions. Authentic worship is simply a genuine expression of praise, adoration, celebration, and thanksgiving to God in response to who He is and what He has done in our lives.

The book you are holding explores what it means for us as the body of Christ and as individuals, including how to pursue authentic worship—not only in our weekly worship services, but also in our everyday lives. You will be introduced to seven words of worship that will serve as
a guide for *knowing* and *experiencing* God in worship. As you apply these teachings in your own life, you will be inspired and equipped to develop a *lifestyle of worship*, which is God’s desire for every believer.

We are passionate about helping individuals and congregations develop a consistent lifestyle of worship. As you increase in understanding of who God is and what He has done in your life, consistent and fervent worship will be your natural response. And as you worship, God will inhabit your praise and impact your circumstances.

### Our Threefold Purpose

*Seven Words of Worship* was initiated by God and birthed through years of effort by my coauthor and friend, Stan Moser. Although this is a collaborative work, I (Mike) will serve as the “voice” throughout this book, representing our collective insights that we pray will accomplish our threefold purpose:

1. To help you gain a clear revelation of God who desires worship to be the focal point and passion of our lives (Rom. 12:1);
2. To give you a solid understanding of the biblical foundation that leads us to become true worshippers (John 4:23–24); and
3. To encourage you to enter into biblical authenticity in your worship as you respond to God’s revelation evidenced in your daily expression of faith in Christ (2 Cor. 3:17).

### About This Book

To achieve these goals, we present some simple, foundational truths about biblical worship in eight sections with five chapters in each section. This format allows you to read and embrace the content over a forty-day period.

Each section combines biblical insights with real-life stories and personal reflections that are designed to help you apply what you are reading. Though you may sense a logical progression in the core concepts, we will explore them from different angles and consider subtle nuances to maximize your understanding and application. There will be several key Scriptures in each section to reinforce biblical truths central to your study and to help hide God’s Word in your heart.
Music and Worship Go Hand in Hand

Each section of this book begins with a “Song of Worship” that may or may not be familiar to you. We encourage you to read and meditate on the lyrics. The lyrics will speak directly to your heart, inspiring your own expression of praise to God. The CD, *Words of Worship . . . for a Lifetime of Experiencing God*, is designed to enhance your reading experience. To purchase go to www.lifeway.com or your local Christian retailer.

Here are a few suggestions that will help bring this book to life for you:

- Trust the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. Ask Him for guidance as you seek to gain greater biblical understanding of authentic worship and develop your lifestyle of worship. Release your mind and heart in ready obedience to all He will teach you.
- Be consistent—a lifestyle of worship is a radical change for many, and diligent attention to the Word of God is the key.
- Take time each day to express your worship and appreciation to the King of kings.
- Pray for revelation and breakthrough.

As you read, our hope and prayer is that you will be filled with a refreshing and clear perspective of authentic worship, and you will be challenged to fulfill God’s desire for you to lift your voice and your life as an expression of worship.
Song of Worship

“Unto the One”

You broke the curse of sin
You were slain Lamb of God
No greater love has ever been displayed
Crucified at the hands of sinners You were
Risen to life on the third day

Victorious One, Great Healer
You are worthy, Jesus worthy
There is no end to Your majesty
Lamb of God, You bought with Your blood
Men from every tribe and tongue
Lion of Judah, You have overcome

(Chorus)
Unto the One who sits on the throne
Unto the Lamb who was slain
Be all blessing and honor
Glory and power and praise forever

(Bridge)
Worthy is the Lamb of God
Who takes away the sins of the world

—Words and Music by Matt Papa
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Experiencing God—
A Personal Encounter

Worship is the key to experiencing God in our lives.

There is a real hunger in the church today to know and experience God in a personal way. Truth is, we were created to know God in this way, to have a relationship with Him. God made us this way because He desired an intimate relationship with us before the beginning of time.

God Desires a Relationship with Us

All lasting relationships are based on mutual interest, trust, and understanding. By choosing to create us in His image—with a mind (the ability to reason), a will, and emotions—and by providing everything we need for life, God created and equipped us for a lasting relationship with Him.

My brother, Bill, is my “big brother” in every sense of the word. Not only is he three years older than me, but he was always much bigger
than me. He was what they called “an early bloomer,” always the biggest boy in his class. He was a good athlete and often the captain of whatever game was going on. Two things were true when it came to Bill and me: he picked on me all the time and he made sure that absolutely no one else did. One day in the 5th grade I learned the advantages of having a brother like Bill. I was walking toward the cafeteria when two 7th graders stopped me and demanded my milk money. I felt like I had no choice but to dig down in my pocket and give it to them. I had just handed it over when a friend of the two walked by and said, “What are you doing? Don’t you know who that is? That’s Bill Harland’s little brother.” Immediately they gave me my money back! I was never happier to be Bill Harland’s little brother.

When it comes to worship, it’s all about relationship—relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. I did nothing to get my milk money back that day except be Bill’s little brother. In the same way, we’ve done nothing to deserve a worship encounter with the Living God, except receiving the redemption found only in Jesus.

From beginning to end, the Bible makes it clear that God desires a relationship with us. He wants us to know who He is, who we are in relationship to Him, how we should respond, and what we can expect in return. As we examine these aspects of God’s desire and plan for relationship with us, consider what the following verses tell us:

Where can I go to escape Your Spirit?
Where can I flee from Your presence?
If I go up to heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there. (Ps. 139:7–8)

“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me.” (John 15:5)

“In a little while the world will see Me no longer, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live too. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, you are in Me, and I am in you.” (John 14:19–20)

This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given to us from His Spirit. And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. (1 John 4:13–15)
These four passages of Scripture leave no room for doubt: God loves us and desires a personal relationship with each of us. All we have to do is respond! God wants to reveal Himself and His will in every situation of our lives. As we respond, we can experience God every day.

Worship Is the Key to Experiencing God

A number of years ago, Henry Blackaby and Claude King provided us with wonderful insights and principles on how to experience God and discover His will in our everyday lives. Their best-selling book Experiencing God gave us clear instruction to help us fulfill our purpose on the earth: see what God is doing around us and join Him as He works through us. It all begins with God’s offer of a personal and intimate relationship. As we respond, we really can experience God!

Experiencing God delivered a tried and proven message for the church, and I’ve seen the results in an up-close-and-personal way. You see, I’ve spent my entire adult life serving in churches, from some of the smallest to the largest churches in America, and I’ve seen many of God’s people embrace His mission for their lives—the plans God prepared for them before they were even born. I’ve also seen many others miss their opportunity to experience God.

For years I wondered what it would take for more of God’s church—ordinary folks like you and me—to fully embrace His love for us, step beyond our distractions and doubts, and truly join God as He works right where we live. I believe with all my heart that the key to breakthrough—the key to experiencing God in our own lives and having a personal relationship with Him—is found in developing a lifestyle of worship.

Worship Is Our Response to God’s Revelation

Throughout this book, we will use this working definition of worship:

Worship is our response to God’s revelation of who He is and what He has done.

But we have to be careful that what we are responding to is, in fact, God’s revelation. We are so prone to trust our own perception and emotion that we can substitute them for reality in a heartbeat.
One day God gave me a real-life illustration of my tendency to do that very thing.

I was flying from Nashville to Dallas and was already in my seat when a smartly dressed professional lady boarded the plane and took the seat across the aisle from me. I attempted to speak to her but received no response. *She’s a little rude,* I thought to myself. Throughout the flight I noticed her preoccupation with her laptop. She wouldn’t even respond to the flight attendant when asked if she wanted a drink. I kept right on sizing her up. *Boy, she thinks she’s really important. I wonder what her problem is.*

When we landed at DFW, she immediately took out her cell phone and fired it up. This was before the airlines would let you do that and my “judgment meter” was really in full gear now. This is when the Lord reeled my flesh right on in for the kill. *Well, look at that. She thinks she’s so important that the rules don’t apply to her. It’s not like she’s a surgeon and she’s flying in to do emergency surgery in a life-or-death matter.* I had no more finished that thought when the person she was calling answered the phone and she said, “I’ve just landed. Is the patient prepped for surgery? I’ve been reviewing the procedure on the flight. Is the police escort going to meet me at the gate or in front of the airport? I should be there in twenty minutes. Every moment will count.” When we got to the gate, she was escorted off the plane by an agent and whisked away to try and save someone’s life. I started to cry as I asked the Lord to forgive me and then prayed for her and the person she would be operating on in just minutes.

Since we are so prone to be presumptuous all the time, we better be sure where we look for information about our God when we gather to worship Him. And God has faithfully given us ways to know who He is so that we can be confident when we worship Him.

Simply stated, we are called to respond to all that God has revealed about Himself and to His never-ending desire to enter a deeper relationship with each of us. Through the ages God has been in the constant process of revealing His character and essence. Yes, God is mysterious in many ways, but He is never a mystery. He has gone to great lengths to reveal Himself throughout history—including sending His Son, Jesus, into the world—and He continues to reveal Himself today in at least three ways:

1. God reveals Himself in creation.
2. God reveals Himself through His Word.
God created us for relationship with Him and deeply desires to reveal Himself—who He is and what He has done—to us. He has promised to meet us as we worship. In fact, as we understand and embrace all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus, our only reasonable and adequate response is worship. Our response to God always requires faith and corresponding action, yet God never forces us to respond—it is always our choice.

Worship Invites God’s Presence

God deeply desires a personal relationship with each one of us, and He is at work around us at all times. Just as God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, so He desires to fellowship and communicate with each of us. God has promised in Psalm 22:3 to inhabit the praises of His people, and God is always true to His promises. Our worship provides a place of meeting with God—a place for us to encounter His very presence and embrace His invitation to join Him as He works.

But You are holy, O You Who dwell in [the holy place where] the praises of Israel [are offered]. (Ps. 22:3 AMP)

As we focus our time and attention on the Lord in worship, proclaim His place of honor in our lives, and thank and praise Him for His eternal promises, we can expect God to intervene in our circumstances. God has promised to inhabit our worship, and He will. And when the King is present, all things are possible!

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 is eternal; His faithfulness endures through all generations. (Ps. 100:4–5)

That’s why we must worship through the good times and the bad—when we’re waiting for God’s merciful touch in our circumstances and when we’re standing in awe of His power at work around us. Worship invites God’s presence, enabling us to experience God.

The Bible is filled with many examples of those who responded to God’s revelation with worship and experienced Him. You’ll find their names throughout Scripture—Abraham, David, Daniel and his friends, Mary, Joseph, Peter, and Paul. As you read further, you will soon understand how absolutely vital worship was in their lives.
These great Bible heroes had a clear revelation of God—of who He is and what He has done. They responded to that revelation with worship, and they experienced the presence and power of God in their lives. Their lives are confirmation: you and I can experience God in worship!

Psalm 22:3 is a cornerstone verse on worship. It is often helpful to look at a passage of Scripture in different translations to fully grasp the meaning of each word or phrase.

But thou art holy,  
O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. (Ps. 22:3 KJV)

But You are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel. (Ps. 22:3 HCSB)

But You are holy, O You Who dwell in [the holy place where] the praises of Israel [are offered]. (Ps. 22:3 AMP)

Let’s take a look at the meaning of several key words in that passage from the King James Version, the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the Amplified Bible (see above) or your favorite translation.

Holy—sacred, spiritually pure, sinless, deserving deep respect and awe

Inhabit—to live in

Enthroned—placed on a throne and exalted

Our God does indeed deserve our deep respect, awe, and worship! And He has promised His holy presence as we worship. Simply put, our worship expression creates a place for us to encounter and experience God.

Think about It This Way

When we think about worship, we often think about what we receive from the experience. But what about what God receives?

Our daughter Elizabeth is the second child of three and our only girl. I often tell people, “We have three children—one of each.” What I mean is that each one is so different from the other two—in personality, in strengths and interests—that they seem like three different kinds of people! Recently Elizabeth and I went on a college visit together. She is a senior right now and selecting where she will go to college is
a real priority for us. As we were driving, we began to talk about life at our house after Elizabeth goes to college. I can tell you, I’m not looking forward to it. I’ve already sent one off to college—my son Lee, and that was hard. But sending Elizabeth off to school feels very different and, to be honest, I dread it. You see, Elizabeth is a big part of our family “sound track.” You know what a family “sound track” is, don’t you? That’s what your family sounds like when you are all there. Our son Lee is on the quiet side and is very happy in his room listening to a symphony or something. Sometimes we don’t even know he’s there. But Elizabeth (I call her “Little B”) is usually with us unfolding the latest drama of her life in full detail.

As we were driving toward the college, it hit me how much quieter our “sound track” will be when she leaves for school. We will still have plenty of stuff to do to keep us busy and places to go with John still at home—plenty of everything, except Elizabeth. And, in the words of Bob Benson—noted music publisher, author, and speaker—in “parental math,” busy minus Elizabeth won’t equal plenty. Soon the tears began to flow as I started missing my “Little B.”

I’m convinced God feels that way about us, too. I remember singing tenor in a choir with a bunch of great (and loud) tenors recently and feeling like I wasn’t needed. Just as I was thinking to myself, They don’t need me. I might as well not sing in this choir, I sensed a nudge from the Holy Spirit say, “Sing for Me! I want to hear you sing because no one can take your place with Me!” I started singing again as strong as I could!

God has plenty of everything—except you. And your worship is the time when you open up yourself and pour out on the One who loves you more than anyone else. So, don’t always be consumed with what you get in worship. Think about what you give. God wants worship from you. No one else can give that to Him.

Call to Worship

As you read this book, I encourage you to offer up your own unique expression of worship—an expression of appreciation, adoration, desperation, and expectation that is reserved deep within you for God and God alone. Whether your worship includes three verses and a chorus, liturgical litanies, a cappella hymns, banners and dance, solemn assembly, or loud, exuberant praise, God is waiting to hear from you.
And as you respond to His great love and sacrifice for you—whether you are worshipping corporately or in the privacy of your own home—you will experience God. He is ready, willing, and able to meet you right where you are as you enter into worship.

**Reflections**

- God desires a personal relationship with each of us.
- Worship is our response to God’s revelation of who He is and what He has done.
- Our worship creates a place to encounter God’s presence and embrace His invitation to join Him as He works.
- God has promised to inhabit our praises as we worship Him.
- God wants to hear our personal expressions of worship.
- Worship is the key to experiencing God in our lives!

**Prayer**

*Dear Father, thank You for loving me and for making a way for me to know You. God, open my eyes so I can see Your greatness. Give me a hunger for Your Word and a desire to give You my worship as long as I live! Amen.*