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## Because of Bethlehem Viewer Guide Session 2: Worship Works Wonders

### Discussion Questions:

- What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

### We All Worship Something

- Max said that whether we are eight or eighty, we all worship something. When he was eight, the object of his love and adoration was a bike he wanted for Christmas. He wrote letters to Santa describing not only the details of what he wanted – a Schwinn with a banana seat and monkey handlebars – but also how it would make him the “happiest and most appreciative boy in town.”
  - When you think back to your childhood or teen years, what would you say was your “bike” equivalent – something you obsessed about and desired with all your heart? As part of your response, share any details you can recall that were especially important to you.
- Eight – year – old Max imagined that the bike would not only change his life, but that it would also change *him* – he would become supremely happy and appreciative. How did your younger self imagine life would be different if you had what you wanted most? In what ways, if any, did you expect it to change not just your life but *you*?
- Like Max’s bike, the things we set our hearts on typically aren’t bad things but good things that have the potential to become ultimate things. Listed below are several categories of good things we might enjoy in life. Briefly review the list, placing a check mark next to the top two or three that are primary sources of happiness, meaning, security, or identity for you right now.
  - Achievement/ Success
  - Power/influence
  - Belonging/ affirmation
  - Lifestyle
  - Religion
  - Appearance
  - Finances
  - Possession
  - Family
  - Health
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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- Share one of the categories you checked. What makes this area of life especially significant to you right now? In what ways is it a good gift from God – a source of happiness, meaning, security, or identity?
- When we make a good thing an ultimate thing – something we set our hearts on above all else – we set ourselves up for disappointment. Max said it is to be “satisfied, then brokenhearted; infatuated, then discouraged; enthralled, then angry.” In what ways, if any, have you experienced this dynamic in connection with the good gift you just described? How has it diminished or failed to provide happiness, meaning, protection, or self-worth?
- What parallels might there be between the area of life you described and your relationship with God? In other words, how might the goodness this gift provides also point to something you need from God, find it difficult to entrust to God, or are learning from God?

## The Power of Worship

- When good things become ultimate things – substitute gods – the challenge we face is this: How can we set our hearts on God about all else without discarding or doing damage to the good things we love? The answer: we immerse ourselves in heartfelt worship. Author and pastor Timothy Keller describes it this way:

*If we have made idols out of work and family, we do not want to stop loving our work and our family. Rather we want to love Christ so much more that we are not enslaved by our attachments ... “Rejoicing” is a way of praising God until the heart is sweetened and rested, and until it relaxes its grip on anything else it thinks that it needs.*

- How would you describe what it means in practical terms to be enslaved by attachments – to have a tight grip on whatever it is we thing we need most? Consider how a tight grip might shape things like everyday choices, relationships, personal growth, ect.
- What does the image of a relaxed grip suggest about what it means to love God *more*?
- Keller uses the words *sweetened*, *rested*, and *relaxed* to describe the heart transformed by worship. Which of these words comes closest to describing a transformation you would like to experience during Advent?
- The angels in the Christmas story rejoiced in worship when they proclaimed to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). Max described three ways we can join with the angels in praise and adoration: we can worship *verbally*, worship *in community*, and worship *demonstrably*. As part of this group meeting, you have an opportunity to practice all three.

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Down below is Psalms 103, a hymn of praise and adoration composed by King David. Use the psalm to worship *verbally* and *in community* by reading it together responsively. As you read, allow the words of the psalmist to be your words, expressing your heart of love and gratitude to God. Worship *demonstrably* by first standing together in a circle. Then, if a word or phrase is especially meaningful to you, allow your body to express what your heart is feeling – raise your hand on open palm, sway in rhythm to the words, or respond in any other way that expresses your heart for God.

Appoint one person to read the lines designated “leader.” As you read the Psalm, pay attention to words for phrases that stand out to you for any reason. After reading the Psalm, use the questions that follow to continue your discussion.

- What words or phrases from the psalm stood out to you? Share the reason for your response.
- What, if anything, shifted in your heart as you read the psalm together? For example, was your heart able to relax its grip, to sweeten to God, to rest?

## Psalm 103

**Leader:** Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

**Group:** Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

**Leader:** The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:

**Group:** The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

**Leader:** As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

**Group:** The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children— with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

**Leader:** The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

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**All:** Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.