

David: A Man After God's Own Heart, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Worship in Reverence and Joy: The Ark Comes Home

2 Samuel 6

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter brings two truths about worship together that people constantly tend to separate, and the teacher's task is to hold them together. Historically, David, now king, seeks to bring the long-neglected ark of God, the symbol of God's presence, to Jerusalem. The first attempt ends in tragedy: the ark is transported on a new cart rather than carried by the Levites as God had commanded, and when Uzzah touches it, God strikes him dead. After the ark rests with Obed-edom, whose household God blesses, David brings it up the second time according to God's instructions, and the chapter ends with the king dancing before the Lord with all his might. The doctrinal stakes are the holiness of God, the principle that worship is to be offered according to His revealed will rather than human invention, and the union of reverence and joy in true worship.

The teacher should draw out the central principle without derailing into modern controversies. Uzzah's death is severe, and the class will feel it, but the key lies in the law: the ark was to be carried by Levites on poles, not on a cart. Israel approached the holy God sincerely and enthusiastically but on their own terms, borrowing a method from the Philistines, and sincerity did not make it acceptable. The lesson is that God cares how He is approached and that worship offered according to His will, not merely with good intentions, is what He receives. This connects naturally to worshipping God by the New Testament pattern, but the teacher should keep the focus on reverence, joy, and obedience rather than turning the class into a debate about contemporary worship practices.

Aim at formation in both directions. Some students approach God with a casual familiarity that has lost the sense of His holiness; others with a stiff formality that has lost its joy. This chapter rebukes both and models the alternative: holy fear and exuberant gladness held together. Press the class to recover reverence where it has faded and joy where it has died, and to bring God worship that is both awe-filled and wholehearted, offered the way He has revealed He desires.

Question 1

Student Question:

When Uzzah reached out and touched the ark, "God struck him down there for his error, and he died there beside the ark of God" (6:7). What does this sobering moment teach us about the holiness of God and about how seriously He takes the way He is approached and worshiped?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting the severity of verse 7 land rather than softening it. Uzzah touched the ark and God struck him dead on the spot. This is meant to teach, in the most unmistakable way, that God is holy and that His holiness is not a figure of speech. The same lesson was taught earlier with Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1–3), where God declares, “Among those who are near me I will be sanctified.”

The teacher should explain what the holiness of God means: He is utterly set apart, pure, and exalted, and He cannot be approached carelessly, as though He were common. The ark represented God’s very presence, and the prohibition against touching it was clear and known. Uzzah’s act, however instinctive, treated as ordinary what God had set apart as holy, and God would not allow His holiness to be treated lightly.

Address the question the class will be asking: was this not too severe? Help them see that our discomfort often reveals how small our sense of God’s holiness has become. We are so accustomed to emphasizing God’s nearness and kindness, both gloriously true, that the equally biblical truth of His holiness can feel foreign. This chapter restores the balance and reminds us whom we are dealing with.

Apply it as a recovery of reverence. The teacher should help the class see that taking God’s holiness seriously is not the enemy of intimacy with Him but its proper frame. We come near, but we come near to the holy God, and that should fill us with reverent awe even as we rejoice in His welcome.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The holiness of God as utterly real, not a figure of speech
- God set apart, pure, and not to be approached carelessly
- The same lesson in Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1–3)
- Our discomfort revealing a shrunken sense of God’s holiness
- Reverence as the proper frame for intimacy, not its enemy

Discussion Prompts

- What does Uzzah’s death teach us about the holiness of God?
- Why does this story make us uncomfortable, and what might that reveal?
- How is reverence for God’s holiness compatible with nearness to Him?

Question 2

Student Question:

It is easy to grow casual with God, to lose the sense that we are approaching the holy Lord of heaven. Where has a sense of God’s holiness faded in your own worship or daily walk, so that you approach Him carelessly or treat sacred things as common? What would it look like to recover a reverent fear of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies the holiness of God to the student's own walk. The aim is to surface the casualness that creeps in over time, so that we begin to treat the holy God and sacred things as common.

Help the class identify where reverence has faded: distracted, routine worship; careless or flippant speech about God; a prayer life that has lost any sense of awe; an approach to Scripture or the Lord's Supper that has become mechanical. Familiarity, which is a gift, can quietly slide into contempt.

Then call for recovery. Reverent fear of God is not terror but a deep, awe-filled seriousness about who He is. It is recovered by beholding His greatness afresh, in Scripture, in creation, in honest prayer. Invite each student to name one area where their reverence has dulled and one way they will recover a holy fear of God this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- How casualness toward God creeps in over time
- Treating the holy and the sacred as common
- Familiarity sliding into contempt
- Reverent fear as awe-filled seriousness, not terror
- Recovering reverence by beholding God's greatness afresh

Discussion Prompts

- Where has a sense of God's holiness faded in your worship or daily walk?
- How has familiarity with sacred things made you casual?
- What would help you recover a reverent fear of God this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Israel transported the ark on a new cart, sincerely and enthusiastically, but not the way God had commanded; the ark was to be carried by the Levites on poles (6:3; compare Exodus 25:14; Numbers 4:15; 7:9). What does this teach us about the difference between worship that is merely sincere and well-intentioned and worship that is offered according to God's revealed will?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question gets to the doctrinal core of the chapter: the difference between sincere worship and worship offered according to God's revealed will. The ark was to be carried by the Levites on poles, as God had plainly commanded (Exodus 25:14; Numbers 4:15; 7:9). Israel instead used a new cart, a method they had, in fact, borrowed from the Philistines (1 Samuel 6).

The teacher should stress that Israel's error was not insincerity. They were enthusiastic, joyful, and devoted; thirty thousand men came out with music and celebration. Their hearts were in it. But their worship was on their own terms rather than God's, and sincerity did not make it acceptable. This is the uncomfortable but crucial lesson: good intentions do not substitute for obedience to what God has revealed.

Draw out the principle carefully. God has the right, as God, to determine how He is to be approached and worshiped. Worship is not a human invention offered for God's approval but a response we bring on the terms He has given. This protects worship from becoming whatever we happen to find moving or meaningful, and roots it instead in God's revealed will.

Connect this naturally, but without derailing, to worshiping God by the New Testament pattern. Just as Israel was to follow God's revealed instructions, Christians today are to worship according to what God has revealed in the New Testament rather than according to human invention, however sincere. The teacher should make the principle clear (worship on God's terms, not ours) while keeping the focus on reverence, joy, and obedience rather than turning aside into contemporary disputes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between sincere worship and worship on God's terms
- Israel's error was not insincerity but disobedience to revealed instruction
- God's right to determine how He is approached and worshiped
- Worship as a response on God's terms, not a human invention
- Worshiping by God's revealed will, applied to the New Testament pattern
- Good intentions as no substitute for obedience

Discussion Prompts

- What was actually wrong with how Israel first transported the ark?
- Why is sincerity alone not enough in how we worship God?
- What does it mean to worship God on His terms rather than our own?

Question 4

Student Question:

We can be completely sincere and still be wrong if we approach God on our own terms rather than His. Where might you be assuming that good intentions and enthusiasm are enough, without asking what God has actually said about how He wants to be worshiped and obeyed? How does this challenge the idea that sincerity alone is what counts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the sincerity-versus-obedience principle into the student's life. The aim is to expose the common assumption that good intentions and enthusiasm are sufficient, without asking what God has actually said.

Help the class see how pervasive this assumption is, not only in worship but in life. We often decide what seems right or meaningful to us and assume God must be pleased because we mean well. Uzzah meant well. Israel meant well. The chapter warns that meaning well is not the same as obeying God.

Then call for a humbler posture: asking what God has revealed rather than assuming our instincts are enough. Invite each student to name one area, in worship or obedience, where they have leaned on sincerity without searching what God has said, and one way they will submit their good intentions to His revealed will this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The assumption that good intentions are enough
- Deciding what seems right to us and assuming God is pleased
- The difference between meaning well and obeying God
- Asking what God has revealed rather than trusting our instincts
- Submitting sincerity to God's revealed will

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you assume good intentions and enthusiasm are enough for God?
- How does this chapter challenge the idea that sincerity alone counts?
- Where do you need to ask what God has said rather than trusting your instincts?

Question 5

Student Question:

After Uzzah's death the ark rested in the house of Obed-edom, and "the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household" (6:11). What does this teach us about the same holy God who must be approached carefully, that His presence, rightly received, is not a threat but a blessing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns to the often-overlooked household of Obed-edom (6:11). The same ark that brought death to Uzzah brought blessing to this home, where it rested for three months: "the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household." The contrast is deliberate and important.

The teacher should draw out the lesson. The presence of God is not inherently a threat; it is, rightly received, a profound blessing. The difference between Uzzah and Obed-edom was not that God was dangerous to one and safe to the other, but that the holy God, approached and

received as He has appointed, is the source of every good. Obed-edom welcomed the ark and was blessed.

Guard against a wrong takeaway. The point is not that God is capricious, blessing one and striking another at random. The point is that the holy God who must be honored is also the gracious God who delights to bless. His holiness and His goodness are not in conflict. The same presence that judges irreverence blesses those who receive Him rightly.

Apply it as encouragement balanced with reverence. The teacher should help the class hold both truths: God is to be approached with reverent fear, and God's presence is the greatest blessing a person can know. We do not shrink from Him in mere dread, nor presume on Him in casual familiarity, but welcome the holy God whose nearness, rightly received, fills a house with blessing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The same presence bringing death to Uzzah and blessing to Obed-edom
- God's presence, rightly received, as profound blessing not threat
- God's holiness and goodness in harmony, not conflict
- Against viewing God as capricious
- Welcoming the holy God whose nearness blesses

Discussion Prompts

- What does Obed-edom's blessing teach us about the holy God?
- How do God's holiness and His goodness fit together rather than conflict?
- Do you tend to view God's nearness as something to fear or to welcome?

Question 6

Student Question:

The presence of God brought death to Uzzah but blessing to Obed-edom's house. As you consider your own life, do you tend to think of God's nearness mainly as something to fear or as something to welcome? How might holding both reverence and gladness together change the way you live in God's presence this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies the Uzzah and Obed-edom contrast to the student's posture toward God. The aim is to help students locate themselves and to move toward holding reverence and gladness together.

Help the class see that an unbalanced view distorts the whole relationship. Those who see God only as fearsome may serve Him anxiously, never resting in His welcome. Those who see Him

only as comfortable may grow presumptuous, losing the awe that keeps love from becoming flippant. The healthy soul holds both.

Then call for growth in the direction each needs. Invite each student to consider whether they lean toward dread or toward presumption, and to name one way they will live this week in the fuller reality of a God who is both holy and gracious, welcomed with reverence and with joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Locating our posture: dread or presumption
- How an unbalanced view distorts the whole relationship
- Anxious service versus presumptuous flippancy
- The healthy soul holding reverence and gladness together
- Living in the reality of a God both holy and gracious

Discussion Prompts

- Do you tend to view God's nearness mainly with fear or as a welcome blessing?
- How might an unbalanced view be distorting your walk with Him?
- How could holding reverence and gladness together change this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When the ark was finally brought up rightly, "David danced before the LORD with all his might," celebrating with abandon (6:14–15). What does this teach us that the same chapter shows both the holy fear of God and David's exuberant, wholehearted joy? How do reverence and joy belong together in true worship rather than canceling each other out?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question fastens on the second half of the chapter, where the same account that taught holy fear now shows exuberant joy. When the ark is brought up rightly, "David danced before the LORD with all his might" (6:14). The teacher should help the class see that one chapter holds both the fear of God and wholehearted gladness, and that this is no contradiction.

Draw out the union of reverence and joy. The popular assumption is that these pull against each other, that the more we fear God the less we can rejoice, and the more we rejoice the less we revere. This chapter denies it. The same David who was rightly sobered at Uzzah's side is the David who leaps and dances before the Lord. True worship is both awe-filled and glad.

Note that David's joy was not irreverent. It came after he had learned to approach God rightly, carrying the ark as God commanded. His exuberance was not careless enthusiasm like the first

attempt; it was wholehearted joy within obedience. Reverence did not quench his joy, and joy did not cancel his reverence. Each completed the other.

Apply it to Christian worship. The teacher should help the class see that we are called to worship God with both reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28–29) and with fullness of joy in His presence (Psalm 16:11). A worship that is all solemnity and no gladness has missed something; so has a worship that is all excitement and no awe. The God who must be honored as holy is the God in whose presence there is fullness of joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One chapter holding both holy fear and exuberant joy
- Reverence and joy as completing, not canceling, each other
- David's gladness as wholehearted joy within obedience
- Worship with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28–29)
- Fullness of joy in God's presence (Psalm 16:11)
- The error of worship that is all solemnity, or all excitement

Discussion Prompts

- What does it teach us that the same chapter shows both fear and dancing?
- How do reverence and joy complete rather than cancel each other?
- How was David's joy different from the careless enthusiasm of the first attempt?

Question 8

Student Question:

Some of us worship God with reverence but little joy, while others worship with enthusiasm but little reverence. Which is more natural for you, and which do you most need to grow in? What would it look like for your worship to hold genuine awe and genuine gladness together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question helps students locate themselves between the two halves of worship and grow toward the whole. Most people lean naturally toward either reverence or joy, by temperament, background, or church culture.

Help the class identify their lean honestly and without judgment. Some come from traditions or temperaments that prize solemnity and may find exuberant joy uncomfortable or suspect. Others prize enthusiasm and may find reverence stifling. Each has half of what this chapter holds whole.

Then call for growth in the missing half. The reverent worshiper may need to recover gladness; the exuberant worshiper may need to recover awe. Invite each student to name which is more

natural for them, which they most need to grow in, and one concrete way they will pursue the fuller worship that holds both this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Locating our natural lean toward reverence or toward joy
- How temperament and church culture shape our worship
- Each lean holding only half of true worship
- Growing in the missing half (gladness or awe)
- Pursuing worship that holds reverence and joy together

Discussion Prompts

- Which is more natural for you in worship, reverence or joy?
- Which do you most need to grow in?
- What is one concrete way you could pursue both together this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

When Michal despised David for dancing before the Lord, he answered that he would celebrate before the Lord who had chosen him, and would be even more undignified than this (6:20–22). What does David's willingness to look foolish in worship, caring more about honoring God than about his own dignity, teach us about the heart God seeks? And since David lived under the Old Covenant, how do we today discern the way God has revealed that He wants to be worshiped under the New Covenant, offering Him both reverence and joyful, obedient worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it does two things: it draws out the heart God seeks in worship, and it points the class toward worshipping God by His revealed will under the New Covenant. Handle both, and keep the focus on reverence, joy, and obedience.

First, the heart God seeks. When Michal despises David for dancing, he answers that he danced before the LORD who chose him, and that he will be even more undignified than this (6:20–22). David cared more about honoring God than about protecting his own dignity. The teacher should help the class see that God seeks worshipers whose hearts are wholly His, who are willing to look foolish before people in order to honor God, and who worship from genuine devotion rather than self-regard. Jesus said the Father seeks those who worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23–24); David's abandon illustrates the spirit, and the right carrying of the ark illustrates the truth. Both matter.

Second, the move from David's covenant to ours. The teacher should make a careful transition. David lived under the Old Covenant, with its ark, its tabernacle, and its detailed ceremonial law,

all of which has now been fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10). We do not bring back the ark, the Levitical carrying, or the ceremonial system. But the abiding principle remains in full force: God still reveals how He desires to be worshiped, and we are to worship Him according to that revelation rather than according to human invention. The difference is that we now look to the New Testament to learn how God would be worshiped under the New Covenant, in spirit and truth, through Christ our mediator.

Be careful and concrete, without derailing. The timeless lessons of this chapter carry straight across: God is holy, He cares how He is approached, and worship is to be offered on His terms with both reverence and joy. The application is to seek what God has revealed in the New Testament about worshiping Him, and to offer it wholeheartedly, rather than to assume that sincerity or enthusiasm alone makes worship acceptable. The teacher should resist turning this into a catalog of modern worship controversies; the aim is a heart that wants to honor God as He has revealed He desires, with awe and with gladness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The heart God seeks: wholehearted devotion over self-regard
- Willing to look foolish before people in order to honor God
- Worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23–24): both heart and obedience
- David under the Old Covenant, now fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10)
- The abiding principle: worship by God’s revealed will, now sought in the New Testament
- Reverence and joy together, on God’s terms, through Christ our mediator
- Sincerity and enthusiasm not making worship acceptable by themselves

Discussion Prompts

- What does David’s willingness to look undignified teach us about the heart God seeks?
- How do we today discern the way God has revealed He wants to be worshiped under the New Covenant?
- How can our worship hold together genuine reverence and genuine joy, offered on God’s terms?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, the stopped procession, the blessed household, and the dancing king. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this account of the ark coming home. What is the single truth about worshiping God, in reverence and in joy, that you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the lesson and turns it toward response. The class has felt the stopped procession, seen the blessed household, and watched the dancing king. Now the aim is one specific, personal step in worship.

Encourage concreteness. One student may need to recover reverence where it has gone casual; another to recover joy where worship has gone stiff; another to stop assuming sincerity is enough and to seek what God has revealed; another to worship God this week with both awe and gladness. The value is in one real step.

Close by lifting the class's eyes to Christ, through whom we now draw near to the holy God with confidence and joy. We do not approach an ark on a cart but the living God through our great High Priest. The teacher should send the class out longing to worship the holy God acceptably, in spirit and truth, with reverence and awe and with fullness of joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from the chapter to a specific step in worship
- Recovering reverence or joy where it has faded
- Drawing near to the holy God through Christ our High Priest
- Worship in spirit and truth as the goal
- Letting one truth take hold this week

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this lesson is God pressing on you most directly?
- What is one specific way your worship will change this week?
- How does drawing near through Christ shape your reverence and your joy?