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## God in a Box

by Phil Ware

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Do you remember the jack-in-the-box toys from your childhood or children's childhood? Weren't they great fun! You turn the crank on a brightly colored box while music plays and then ... POP ... out jumps the figure. At certain ages, a jack-in-the-box can be hours of fun for both adults and children!

I fear, however, that as we have grown up and "gone to church," we've taken our jack-in-the-box mentality with us. We focus our attention on special boxes of worship. We attend and see what happens in those boxes to surprise and delight us. Based on what whether we like what happens or not, we go away feeling like we've had a good or bad worship experience. Either way, we often feel we've put in our time to fulfill our worship responsibilities, punched our ticket for another week, and can then pretty much go live our daily lives as we choose.

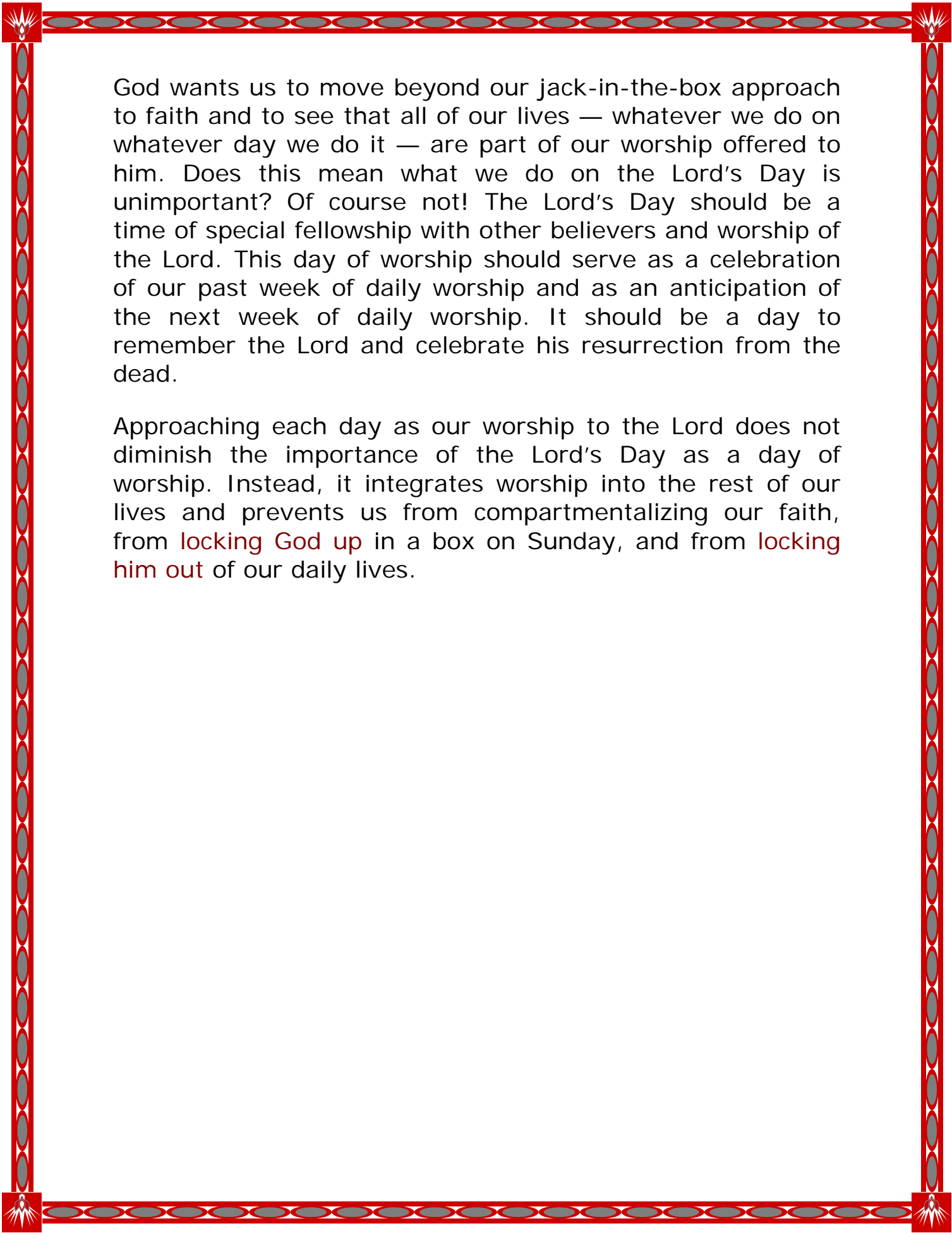
This approach to worship has sometimes been called the "God in a box" syndrome. While modern westerners didn't invent it, we've perfected it to an art form! We build elaborate and expensive boxes — calling them auditoriums, sanctuaries, cathedrals, worship centers and a host of pious and important sounding names — and focus incredible amounts of attention on what happens in them. We develop a mindset that suggests that if we can get our weekend worship event done correctly, we're set for the week and have punched our ticket for heaven. We can go back to our work, recreation, parenting, schooling, and sinning while being pretty much okay if we can go get another dose of the "worship thing" again next weekend.

Two great dangers have become realized among us with this approach to worship.

First, we put way too much pressure on what happens in the worship box to be breath-taking, earth-moving, and spine-tingling. Rather than being a part of our life of worship, this weekly event becomes our life of worship. Rather than being the consummation of a week of daily worship, it becomes the primary worship experience in our week. This means everything important about our worship depends upon that small amount of time we are the worship box.

Second, this approach to worship helps us secularize and compartmentalize our lives, so that worship does not intrude into our workplace, our schools, our recreation, and even our families. We give God his hour at the special box, and then we can do pretty much what we like with the rest of our time. We confine God to the box so we can rule our own lives.

God has never wanted us to see our worship as only a little bit of time on a holy day at a holy box. Worship cannot, and must not, be separated from the daily lives we lead. Simply offering holy words on a holy day are not God's goal for us. He wants us to be living sacrifices that are freely offered to him out of thankful hearts touched by his rich mercy and grace. (**Romans 12:1-2**) While God demands that we worship him with reverence and awe, we must understand that he is not focusing as much on what happens in our holy box as he is focusing on what happens in our daily lives. (**Read Hebrews 12:28-29 and Hebrews 13:15-16** and notice that everything in between those two passages describes what God is after in our reverent worship. You will find hospitality to strangers, remembering those in prison, honoring our marriages, handling money correctly, and respecting our spiritual leaders on this list of reverent worship!)



God wants us to move beyond our jack-in-the-box approach to faith and to see that all of our lives — whatever we do on whatever day we do it — are part of our worship offered to him. Does this mean what we do on the Lord's Day is unimportant? Of course not! The Lord's Day should be a time of special fellowship with other believers and worship of the Lord. This day of worship should serve as a celebration of our past week of daily worship and as an anticipation of the next week of daily worship. It should be a day to remember the Lord and celebrate his resurrection from the dead.

Approaching each day as our worship to the Lord does not diminish the importance of the Lord's Day as a day of worship. Instead, it integrates worship into the rest of our lives and prevents us from compartmentalizing our faith, from **locking God up** in a box on Sunday, and from **locking him out** of our daily lives.