



Life Worship

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Worship is What?

Worship is a life. Worship is a life before it's an event. Before it's a song, a service, a seminar or a sure-fire way to church growth, worship is a life. Before it's a means to an end, a financial bottom line for recording entrepreneurs, or an after-thought in the church planting process, worship is a life. Before it's a musical genre or something we've always done before the sermon, worship is a life. Experiencing, planning, leading, critiquing or participating in corporate worship was never intended to be a substitute for worship of the heart or even a preliminary. In God's economy, worship is always a matter of the heart first.

***Real worship in spirit and truth is
a life offered to God in response to His grace and love in Christ,
a breath-by-breath glorification of Who He is,
a delighting in and obedience to His Living Word,
and a humble praise for His awesome deeds among all nations.***

Behind the Curtain

There is a malaise that exists in Evangelical circles today regarding worship. It is a disquieting confusion that cripples our journeys toward a deeper, more intimate relationship with God. It hinders our spiritual depth and experience of God's presence in our corporate gatherings. Living out real worship is like participating in a dramatization of our theology. However, much of what passes today for worship has the appearance of a theatrical production where the curtain is parted only slightly. The result is that we see only a sliver of the amazing, glorious drama that is in process just beyond the veil.

I invite you to get up out of your seat and join us on stage where we can get a better glimpse of what God is up to behind the curtain.

Real worship in spirit and truth is a life...

Real worship is the antithesis of false worship. Everyone worships. The difference is that some participate in real worship, which "engage(s) (one's) spirit in the pursuit of truth."¹ Others immerse themselves in false worship of demons and things made by their own hands.² Real worship begins only after a turning of heart, soul and mind to God. "You deserted the dead idols of your old life so you could embrace and serve God, the true God."³

When Jesus addressed a new friend and would-be worshiper at a lonely well outside a Samaritan village, His words to her became His most profound recorded statement on the topic of worship to be found anywhere in Scripture. What did Jesus say?

¹ John 4:23b MSG

² cf. Rev. 9:20b NLT

³ 1 Thess. 1:9b, MSG

1. *Worship is not a matter of here or there, but here and now.*

Jesus removed the barriers from worship where we tend to erect them. Rather than base one's relationship with God upon a denominational label, a familial background or title on our business card, Jesus insisted that a real relationship with God begins and ends in this: a life of worship lived in spirit and truth.

We tend to cut the legs off of biblical worship by how we use the term. We ask, "How long does the worship last?" (This implies that worship has only to do with the musical portion of Sunday mornings and that when the music ends, the worship ends with it.) However, Jesus says, "When and why must your worship ever end?" He went on to tell the Samaritan woman that the time has come "when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter. It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth."⁴ With these few sentences Jesus exploded the doors off the worship of God forever.

No longer is worship tied to the dimensions of place or time, a worship service or portion thereof. The doors of worship are flung wide open into the realms of spirit and soul where we can on one level, as Thomas Kelly writes, be "thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings... Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continually return."⁵ Brother Lawrence called it "an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God."⁶

If, indeed, we are the very dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, then the sanctuary goes with us wherever we go.⁷ God is inviting us 24 hours a day into His majestic presence. Once-in-a-while, here-and-there, now-and-then worshipers are not worshipers in spirit and truth and are not the kind of worshipers sought out by the Father. "This then is worship in its largest sense: petition as well as praise, preaching as well as prayer, hearing as well as speaking, actions as well as words, obeying as well as offering, loving people as well as loving God."⁸

2. *Worship is a relationship between "whos," not merely a list of "hows."*

Before we explore the "how" of worship, we must have the "Who" of worship firmly established at the center of our devotion. "You must worship no other gods, but only the LORD, for he is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you."⁹

Meditate again on the amazing dialogue in John 4. Just as there were two main characters at the well on the outskirts of that Samaritan town, there are two main characters at the well of the eternal springs of life-giving worship: the Father and you. Take note that the Father is not seeking those who know only the "hows" of worship, who can exegete every Greek and Hebrew word translated "worship," or those who know a lot about worship. He is seeking worshipers.

"Being a worshiper" is exactly what it implies; it is *being* before doing. God doesn't father "human doings," but human beings. We are worshipers first; husbands, wives, plumbers, pastors, sisters, and mothers second. Our doing can only flow out of our being. What freedom there is in knowing that God is seeking *you*, not just what you *do*! The Father desires, yes, is seeking you

⁴ John 4:23, MSG

⁵ Thomas Kelly quoted in Foster, Richard and Smith, James Editors, *Devotional Classics: selected readings for Individuals and Groups*, Harper Books, NY, 1990, '91, '93, p. 207

⁶ *ibid*, p. 83

⁷ cf. I Cor. 6:19

⁸ Packer, James, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986, page for July 15

⁹ Exodus 34:14 NLT

out, to have a relationship with you—amazing, humbling, but so true. "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."¹⁰

Worship is the mother tongue of the most important, most intimate of all relationships. However you worship, it will be empty if at its core it isn't all about a heavenly "Who," a relationship of growing intimacy between you and your loving heavenly Father. Living worship is moving through our existence on this planet with a growing passion to know and experience real intimacy with the only true God and His son Jesus Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a God-saturated, God-satisfied, God-surrendered, God-receptive and God-responsive life.

Real worship in spirit and truth is a life...

... offered to God in response to His grace and love in Christ,

Who can fathom the full measure of the love of Christ, the depths of His grace? It is grace and love that, breaking all the social taboos of the day, went in search of the town outcast from a reviled people and shared with her the most amazing good news in the most straight-forward words given to anyone up to that point. "I am he (the Messiah)," said Jesus. "You don't have to wait any longer or look any further."¹¹

It is love that appeared in the manger. Grace bled and suffered in my place at Calvary. It is love that didn't think it beneath him to bless the children, heal the blind and touch the unclean. It is grace that calls me, blind in my selfishness and unclean in my sinfulness, to come and worship the Father who so loved the world. Such grace and love invites --- no, --- demands, our response. But what kind of response is worthy of the amazing love of God?

The apostle Paul makes an impassioned plea that his readers respond to Christ's love, which he has just described in intimate, glorious detail in Romans 1-11. At the beginning of chapter 12 we can almost picture Paul on his knees as he pleads with us, begging us to respond to God by offering our lives as a "sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around...offering."¹² Literally, "be a living and holy sacrifice."¹³

The writer of Hebrews beautifully echoes Paul's understanding that the sacrificial offering of one's life as the supreme act of worship is in no way divorced from the day-to-day one-another-ness of our lives. "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise -- the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority."¹⁴ Words like "doing good," "sharing," and "obeying" remind me of my conversations with my 7-year-old daughter, Hannah. There are many days I feel as if I must return to the kindergarten classroom of worship and begin learning all over again.

Selah.¹⁵ At this point in our discussion, it might help to take a short intermission and reflect. It may have occurred to you that real worship is in no way a pursuit to be taken lightly. If you're at all like me, you may find yourself sobered by words like "offering" and "sacrifice." These words imply an altar and a laying down of our lives --- in a word, "death." A worshipping life is a life given up. "If you cling to your life," Jesus said, "you will lose it; but if you give it up for me, you will find

¹⁰ Zeph. 3:17 NIV

¹¹ John 4:23 MSG

¹² Romans 12:1 MSG

¹³ Romans 12:1 NLT

¹⁴ Heb. 13:15-16 NIV

¹⁵ Used 71 times in the Psalms, most likely to designate a pause for meditation on the song lyrics sung this far. Cf. <http://www.mountainretreat.org.net/faq/selah.html>

it.”¹⁶

A worshiper is one who is intent on finding this life Jesus promised, by following Jesus. In pursuing the Christ-life, one soon learns that not only does the path lead to a cross, but that we must carry our cross on the way to discovering more of His. “Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who despise their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”¹⁷ Jesus sacrificed His life for our redemption. We, in turn, sacrifice our self-will and selfish ambitions for His glory by continually (daily) taking up our cross.¹⁸

I'll never forget what missionary stateswoman, Helen Rosevere, said during my first and only Urbana Conference in 1981. “We encounter our cross whenever our will intersects the will of God.” She went on to describe how she was brutally attacked and raped by those to whom she had come to share Christ's love. Yet she was not bitter. Standing before the crowd of 17,000 college students, she could honestly say she loves and has forgiven her attackers. The context of Jesus' words in Luke 9 (suffering, death, denying oneself, losing one's life) make it clear that the life of a worshiper involves a response of great sacrifice... and great reward.¹⁹

In Christ

Real and true worship is not a multi-faith experiment; a religious smorgasbord from which we can pick and chose the spiritual dishes that best suit our fancy on any given day. It is Christ's exclusive claim to lordship, deity, and worship that signal the downfall of all other religious systems and ideologies. True worship is worship in truth, which is found only in Jesus Christ. Our faith and belief, our good behavior, our freedom, our very life itself and all things pertaining to life on earth and in heaven are all summed up in Christ.²⁰

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I love the song 'Breathe' written by Marie Barnett. “This is the air I breathe... Your holy presence living in me... and I, I'm desperate for You.”²¹ A number of years ago Dr. Bill Bright introduced the concept of spiritual breathing to a wider audience. He used something common to everyone to illustrate how to be filled with the Holy Spirit as we “exhale” through confession of sin and “inhale” by receiving the in-filling of the Holy Spirit by faith. We would do well to think of worship in a similar way—as our life breath.

It is interesting to note that in one of the most quoted passages regarding the in-filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18) we are told that one of the primary evidences of being filled with the Spirit is that we worship God both in our internal experience and our outward expression. “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²² Speaking and singing both require breath, as does all of our worship.

Soli Deo Gloria

If you happened to find yourself at the fish market in Leipzig, Germany in the late 1770's you may have been surprised to find them wrapping your evening meal in sheet music for piano and organ. Today a copy of that music might sell at auction for thousands of dollars. Now considered to be one of the most brilliant composers of all time, J.S. Bach died a poor man in

¹⁶ Matt 10:39 NLT

¹⁷ John 12:25 NLT

¹⁸ cf. Luke 9:23 NLT

¹⁹ cf. Matt. 19:29

²⁰ cf. Col. 2:5, Eph. 1:10, I Pet. 3:16, I Thess. 2:14, Gal. 2:4,20, Rom. 6:23, II Cor. 2:14, I John 2:27

²¹ *Breathe*, Words and Music by Marie Barnett, 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing

²² Ephesians 5:19-20 NIV

1750, his music so undervalued that its best use was considered to be fish wrap.

Take any piece of "fish wrap" by Johann Sebastian Bach and you're likely to see inscribed at the beginning two letters, 'J.J.' and at the end three letters, 'S.D.G.' The initials stand for 'Jesu, Juva' --- meaning 'Jesus, help' --- and 'Soli Deo Gloria' --- meaning, 'To God alone be the Glory.'

Bach's musical dedications to God were simply guideposts for any who cared to follow the path to its source: a deep reservoir of faith from which flowed the beauty and creativity of his music. "The aim and final reason...of all music..." wrote Bach, "should be none else but the Glory of God and the recreation of the mind. Where this is not observed, there is no real music but only devilish hubbub."²³ The streams that fed this reservoir were a heart that beat passionately for the glory of God to be manifest in every aspect of his life, a dedication to musical excellence (because God is excellent), and love for the Word of God as evidenced by a well-worn and underlined Bible.

Thankfully, you don't have to be a musical genius to glorify God. Glorifying God is as simple as manifesting His presence. It happens when we "show-off" *who He is*. "This is how my Father shows who he is--when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples."²⁴ "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."²⁵

The Psalmist prayed, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness."²⁶ It is in the name of God that we find resident all of His attributes that so rightly deserve our praise. The many names given to God in Scripture reveal to us His awesome character. Here are just a few:

El Shaddai: "God Almighty."²⁷

El Olam: "The Everlasting God."²⁸

Yahweh Jireh (Yireh): "The Lord will provide."²⁹

Yahweh Shalom: "The Lord is Peace."³⁰

Yahweh Sabaoth: "The Lord of Hosts."³¹

Yahweh Maccaddeshcem: "The Lord your Sanctifier."³²

Pater: "Father."³³

God's character consists of both immutable and transferable attributes. His immutable attributes are those that are uniquely God's and no one else's. He alone is Almighty, Everlasting God, Sanctifier, and Father. His transferable attributes are those that He desires to form in us as we grow up in Him. God is gracious, good, compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love, faithful, and righteous.³⁴ These are just a few of the attributes that God desires to "show off" in and through us. Within our unique callings from God we must all find a way to humbly sign the pages of our lives S.D.G. 'Soli Deo Gloria.'

²³ David, Hans T. and Mendel, Arthur: *The Bach Reader. A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents. Revised Edition.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966. Page 32-33 Cited on web page <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Topics/Religion-5.htm>

²⁴ John 15:8 MSG

²⁵ Matt. 5:16 NASB

²⁶ Ps. 115:1 NIV

²⁷ Ps. 91:1, 2

²⁸ Gen. 16:13

²⁹ Gen. 22:14

³⁰ Judges 6:24

³¹ 1 Sam. 1:3; 17:45

³² Ex. 31:13

³³ John 15:16; 16:23; Eph. 2:18; 3:15; 1 Thess. 3:11

³⁴ cf Ps. 145:7-9, 13

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"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."³⁵ John Piper's much-quoted adage is both biblically sound and experientially supported. The longest "song" in the Bible's "Hymn Book" is a tribute to the Word of God and the songwriter's response of delight in it.

"I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word." "Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors."³⁶ "Your decrees are my treasure; they are truly my heart's delight."³⁷

Elsewhere in the "songs" the Psalmist makes it clear that it is not just delight in Him and His word that glorifies and honors the Lord, but it is the obedience that flows from that delight.

"Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD. Yes, happy are those who delight in doing what he commands."³⁸ "But they delight in doing everything the LORD wants; day and night they think about his law."³⁹

Piper captures well the synergy that exists between delight and obedience. He writes, "...God is glorified most not merely by being known, nor by merely being dutifully obeyed, but by being enjoyed in the knowing and the obeying... In all our life and all our study and all our ministry let us seek to glorify God by being satisfied in him above all things."⁴⁰

Just as we learned above, real worship involves offering ourselves. Perhaps one of the most fragrant offerings the Lord can smell upon the altar of worship is that of our obedience.⁴¹

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My wife, Sarah, and I stood before a crowd of several hundred from 30 countries inviting them to enter into the presence of the Lord of the Nations, the Lamb upon the throne before whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Singing to the right of us was a beautiful young woman from Serbia, and another from Bosnia, a drummer from Romania, a bass player from the US: to my left was a Hungarian guitar-player and singer.

After we began with several sweet songs of praise and adoration, a brother from Holland felt led by the Lord to come up on the platform. He asked if he could teach us a simple song about unity in the body of Christ. Halfway into the first chorus the grace of God was so powerfully evident and the presence of God so strong that we could hardly sing. All of us—each member of this unique, picture-of-heaven worship team—had tears streaming down our faces. Why? Because only Jesus can bring true unity, forgiveness and reconciliation among the nations of Central Europe who have been warring for centuries.

³⁵ Piper, John. 1991. *The Pleasures of God*. Portland: Multnomah. Page 9.

³⁶ Ps. 119:16,24 NIV

³⁷ Ps. 119:111 NLT

³⁸ Ps. 112:1 NLT

³⁹ Ps. 1:2 NLT

⁴⁰ John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, Crossway books, 1998, p. 75

⁴¹ cf. I Sam. 15:22

Worship is global. God is committed to seeing "righteousness and praise spring up among all nations."⁴² Over and over in the Scriptures, we see worship and mission woven together in a sacred tapestry of glory.

"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been revealed."⁴³

"All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name."⁴⁴

"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples." "Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength."⁴⁵

"The godless nations will sit up and take notice—see your glory, worship your name--"⁴⁶

"Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise."⁴⁷

If we say we have a heart for God, then we will have a heart for what's on God's heart. And what's on God's heart is the nations! His passionate desire is that men and women, boys and girls the world over will turn from the worship of idols to embrace and worship and serve the true and living God.⁴⁸

As a leader of worship (I would prefer the term "lead worshiper" which is becoming more common vernacular among worship leaders) preparing for and participating week after week in the leading of God's people, it has been helpful for me to remember that the greatest celebration of corporate worship is yet to come. When we bow in the presence of the Lamb of God with the redeemed from every tribe, tongue and nation to give Him glory—that will be the ultimate in worship.

Pulling back the curtain

Our short-term missions team was happy to be anywhere warm as our tour guide led us past the marble colonnades and into the magnificent auditorium. We had been outside most of the day meandering through the gray January streets of Vienna. One way to warm ourselves without too much expense was to take a tour of the Vienna Opera House.

I'll never forget the stunned silence that descended on our group as they pulled back the curtain to reveal the amazing expanse backstage. Since its grand opening on May 25th, 1829, the same performance has never been shown on two consecutive nights. As a result, the opera stage is over a football field in length, two-thirds the size of the auditorium. The stage floor is a full 360 feet (110 meters) deep. All the space is needed to store sets for two complete operas there to be available at all times.

The drama God is unfolding behind the curtain of worship is far more awe-inspiring than any Viennese opera. As His son, as His daughter, ask your Heavenly Father to pull back the curtain of worship in your own heart and life. As you do, you will begin to discover that this God-saturated, God-glorifying life of worship is your highest privilege and your highest calling in Him.

This life of God-worship is our supreme sacrifice of praise before the throne of Christ who shed his blood to give us free access into the presence of the Holy One; it is our requisite response to the One who first loved us, our living out and living in the glory of the Most Glorious One; it is finding ourselves constantly delighted in the radiance of His countenance and the beauty of His holiness; it is our joyful obedience to His powerful, life-transforming Word. It is our humble commitment to be his servants, his messengers of this great, good news to the very ends of the

⁴² Is. 61:11 NIV

⁴³ Rev. 15:4 NLT

⁴⁴ Ps. 86:9 NIV

⁴⁵ Ps. 96:3,7 NIV

⁴⁶ Ps. 102:15 MSG

⁴⁷ Ps 106:47 NIV

⁴⁸ cf. I Thess. 1:9

earth in order that every man, woman, boy and girl would have the opportunity to enter into this God-glorifying life of real worship with us.

One day we will bow together before the throne of the Lamb with that great multitude from every tribe and tongue and people and sing His un-ending praises:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength
belong to our God forever and forever. Amen!"⁴⁹

Until that glorious day, may we see more and more, the splendor and majesty of God that is being displayed just beyond the curtain.

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The *Worship From the Nations* is a ministry of the International Movement of PI. More information about WFN and PI can be found at www.wfn.hu.

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NLT, New Living Translation

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NIV, New International Version

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MSG, The Message Bible

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⁴⁹ Rev. 7:12 NLT