

THE HEART OF WORSHIP: PART II
Pastor Joyce Anderson-Reed/La Paz, Mexico/October 21, 2007

Last week we listened in on a conversation that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman at a well outside her village. Part of their conversation centered on how to worship God. Jesus told her that God wanted people to worship him in Spirit and in Truth. Jesus challenged her that worship was not confined to places, to rituals, but that it was based on a relationship with the Living God.

Do people look at us and know that we're in love with God?

Remember what it's like to fall in love? How you're consumed with that person? You want to see him or her often. You might have written lots of love notes. Talked on the phone for hours. Today, it's probably constant text messaging! You wanted to know everything about that person, likes and dislikes. What you had in common. How you were different. And anyone who looked at you could tell something was up in your life. Your eyes radiated a light that couldn't be contained.

Do people see that same light in your eyes when you talk about God? Does your worship of God spill over from Sunday into every other day of your week?

Psalm 147:11 (CEV) says: *"The Lord is pleased with those who worship him and trust his love."*

John 4:23 says: *"The Father seeks worshipers."*

God is anticipating our love, our excitement, our passion for him. God is looking for us to show up and seek intimacy with him.

But how do we do that? How can we prepare ourselves to be in the presence of God?

In the Bible it says that when people prepared for worship, they gathered with holy expectancy. They believed that they would hear "Kol Yahweh", the voice of God. (Foster. Page 161) Believers gathered with anticipation, knowing that Jesus was present among them and would teach them and touch them with living power.

In the book of Acts we read that when people met for worship, buildings shook with the power of God. Some people dropped dead while others were raised from the dead by the Word of the Lord.

Do we come to worship with holy expectancy? And how does one cultivate holy expectancy? Let me suggest some ideas . . .

Come early to God's sanctuary. Lift your heart in adoration to the King of glory. Sit in your chair and begin to praise your Living God.

Pray that the light of Christ will fill your pastors and other worship leaders.

As people enter the room, glance around and pray for those that seem troubled. Pray that God would minister to their individual needs and lighten their load.

Invite an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Can you imagine what would happen if 3 or 4 people did that at Crossroads every Sunday morning? Imagine what power would be unleashed if a whole room of people practiced Holy Expectancy?

Coming to worship God requires some intentional preparation. Think of it like a date with God. How will you dress? How will you act? What will you say? What words will bubble forth from deep inside you because you're about to spend time in the presence of your Holy Savior, the one who loves you most of all?

Worship also requires participation. Did you know that the word worship actually means "*to prostrate oneself*" . . . to fall down on the ground, with your head touching the floor, blowing holy kisses up to God.

The word Bless . . . when we say "Bless his holy name" . . . this word means "*to kneel.*" In humility we kneel and acknowledge God's majesty.

Thanksgiving means "*an extension of the hand.*" When we offer thanksgiving, we are to use our hands expressively.

The Bible tells us a variety of postures in connection with worship: lying prostrate, standing, kneeling, lifting the hands, clapping the hands, lifting the head, bowing the head, dancing, and wearing sackcloth and ashes. The point is we are to offer

God our bodies as well as all the rest of our being. Worship is meant to be physical! (Foster, page 169)

Sitting still and looking dour is not really an option. And I know some of you are muttering, “Well, I’m not an expressive person. I’m quiet. Shy. Reserved.” And I would simply ask you: What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of what others might think if you lift your hands to worship God? What would happen if you got down on your knees when we prayed?

I’m not talking about manipulated worship. Doing something because everyone else is doing it. I’m talking about being so focused on God, so anointed by the power of the Holy Spirit, that you are compelled to raise your hands, or to bow your head, or to dance in the aisle when we sing, or to kneel in adoration. That your worship of God would not be complete unless you did these things. It might not happen every week. But are you ready to *allow* it to happen, if and when the Spirit convicts you?

Because worship is not about you, and it’s not about me, it’s about God. How many times have one of us said, “I loved worship today.” Or the opposite, “I didn’t get anything out of worship today.” It’s the wrong focus! We don’t worship to please ourselves, we worship to please God. Our motive is to bring glory and pleasure to our Creator. (Warren, page 66)

In Isaiah 29 God complains about worship that is half-hearted and hypocritical. The people were offering God stale prayers, insincere praise, empty words, and man-made rituals without even thinking about the meaning. God’s heart is not touched by tradition in worship, God’s heart is touched by passion and commitment. (Warren, page 66)

So worship requires preparation and participation, and finally I would add that worship is centered on adoration of Jesus.

Genuine worship has only one leader: Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that when 2 or more gather in his name, then Jesus is present with us. When we come together to worship God, to pray, to read his Word, the living presence of Jesus Christ is with us.

Jesus . . . our prophet, our shepherd, our priest, our savior, our blessed Redeemer, our best friend, Emmanuel is here with us.

If Jesus is our leader, then we should expect miracles to occur in worship. Healings, both inward and outward, will be the rule, not the exception. The book of Acts will not just be something we read about, but something we are experiencing. (Foster, page 165)

When we practice authentic relationship with God through Jesus, people will be drawn to join us, even when every fiber of their being screams “Run away!” Let me illustrate with this story by Pastor Rob Bell . . . He shares:

“Several years ago I was hanging around after one of our church services, and a young woman named Yvette walked up to me and told me that she had been listening to me for the last few weeks and hated everything I was saying and totally disagreed with my teachings and all during worship she just wanted to stand up on her chair and yell at me.

“I immediately liked her.

“She went on to say that she was studying witchcraft and was totally opposed to the things she heard me saying.

“I responded, ‘But you keep coming back.’ And then I told her I was thrilled that she kept returning to our gatherings. I hoped that our community would continue to be a safe place for her to question and study and discuss and hear that God loves her exactly as she is.

“The Sunday after 9/11, I talked about the need to forgive people when they wrong us. The word forgive in the Greek language actually means “*to send away*.” People hurt us and harm us, and we end up carrying around these debts they owe us wherever we go. To forgive is to refuse to carry those debts anymore. After the teaching, I walked off the stage and saw Yvette lying facedown on the floor sobbing.

“She later told me that she had been raped years ago and had been carrying rage and anger around with her that controlled her entire life. She realized that she had no hope but to turn all of that bitterness and hurt over to Jesus, who had suffered far more than even her. And while she was at it, she might as well turn her will and her life and everything else over to him.

“So I saw her a few months ago, and she handed me a sheet of paper with her email and phone number on it. I asked her what it was for, and she started telling

me stories of the women she had been meeting who were witches but wanted to become Christians, and if I met any, to send them to her. And the more she talked, the more excited she got, telling me how she's 'an expert in this'." (Bell, pgs. 59-60)

Yvette's story is our story. And God's story. Faith is a communal experience. A shared journey. And Yvette was able to open herself to God, to draw closer to God, because she found a worshiping community that created a safe place for her to explore her questions.

We're all part of something bigger. When I choose to prepare for worship, to participate in worship, to adore Jesus as the center of worship . . . when you choose to do that too . . . we begin to go deeper. Our love relationship with God encompasses all those around us. And those that come seeking the light, are bathed in the light. The Son of God enfolds them with his Spirit and his Love.

Let me close with these words from II Corinthians 3:17-18 (The Message)

3:17

They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We're free of it!

3:18

All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

Amen.

Sources:

Celebration of Discipline by Richard J. Foster. "Worship." Harper & Row. 1978,

The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren. "Day Eight." Zondervan. 2002.

Velvet Elvis by Rob Bell. "New." Zondervan. 2005.