

Reflections on Worship:

Worship is not an option

The nature of our humanity is that we will worship that which is sacred.
(The sacred are the objects of worship, those things for which we live, to which we are ultimately committed, which provide our life meaning and a place in the scheme of things.)

No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Luke 16:13

Each of us is worshipping someone or something. The question is not are we worshipping? , but what is the object of our worship?

Worship is for God alone

We are created beings. As created beings we owe our very existence to our creator. Only the creator is worthy of worship. God, our Creator, has revealed to us both the imperative of worship to him and his worthiness of our worship.

Command:

¹And God spoke all these words:

²"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

³"You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Exodus 20:1-6

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰Jesus said to him, "**Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'**"

Matt. 4:8-10

He is worthy:

- ²³ Sing to the LORD, all the earth;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
- ²⁴ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
- ²⁵ For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
- ²⁶ For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.

²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and joy in his dwelling place.
1 Chronicles 16:23-27

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. Eph. 1:3-8

Worship is Response

Psalms 116; Luke 17:11-19

Worship is the celebrative response to what God has done, is doing and has promised to do.

Worship is response, and the God to be responded to in worship is the God whose grace deserves gratitude. God is not selfish; but like any giver, God-as-giver receives delight in our acknowledgement of the gifts God gives. Therefore the appropriate imagery to understand worship is not the adoring obeisance of a servant for a master, but the grateful rejoicing of those who know themselves as genuinely befriended.

The question that prompts worship is no longer, "What can you give to someone who has everything?" Rather by God's grace, it has become, "What can you give to someone who gives everything?"

Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare His worth. It is about giving to God in recognition of what we have received or are receiving. The why of worship is not found in ourselves but in God alone.

Worship that is holy and pleasing to God

What is the proper response?

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Rom. 12:1

Jim Martin, in an article entitled "Worship as a Way of Life", puts it this way:
God is prior to worship. His grace is prior to our response. We worship in response to God in gratitude for all that he has done for us. In worship, we declare God's worth and respond to his love. In the first day of the week Christians come together in "assembly". The other six days of the week are to be an extension of that worship experience. Worship is to be a way of life because God interacts with us in our everyday lives.

All of life is an expression of worship to God.

John Willis writes:

A study of the history of God's people reveals a tendency to define *worship* as ritual performance of specific external acts in a specific manner at a specific place. Some have reduced worship to "five acts": partaking of the Lord's Supper, praying, singing, preaching, and giving. They assume that when one performs each of these acts "correctly," God guarantees approval, acceptance, protection, and security.

The continuity of thought between the Law, the Prophets, and early Christianity on this fundamental principle of worship is typical of the theological unity of the entire Bible: first one's heart must be right with God, and *only then* can her or his external acts of worship be acceptable

Writing about this subject, Tim Woodroof observed:

Israel came to believe that so long as they observed the forms of a godly people, actually functioning as a godly people was not required.

The Israelites had managed to blur the line between religious forms (temple worship and sacrifice) and a religious function (holy living). They had succeeded in making the former synonymous with the latter. They had become meticulous about means and careless about ends. It is important to see, not that the prophets condemned such confusion, but that they made a clear distinction between the methods used to praise God and the lifestyle lived in submission to him.

You find the same kind of language in the writings of David (Psalm 51:17), Jeremiah (7:9-10), and Hosea (6:6). Each of these writers makes it clear that there is a meaningful difference between the condition of a worshipper's heart and the methods he uses to express himself to God. Proper ceremony is no substitute for a yielded life.

The purpose of this class is to, first, explore the elements of worship (praise, thanksgiving, remembrance, sacrifice, confession, teaching and requests) that spring from the heart of the yielded worshipper; and, second, consider how they find expression in our corporate worship.

Our goal is to deepen our understanding of worship and enhance our personal and corporate worship experience.

Worship Readings

Psalm 51:15-17

- ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.

Isa. 1:10-17

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom; | listen to the law of our God,
you people of Gomorrah! |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|

11 "The multitude of your sacrifices—
what are they to me?" says
the LORD.
"I have more than enough of
burnt offerings,
of rams and the fat of
fatted animals;
I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and
lambs and goats.
12 When you come to appear
before me,
who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts?
13 Stop bringing meaningless
offerings!
Your incense is detestable to
me.
New Moons, Sabbaths and
convocations—
I cannot bear your evil
assemblies.

Micah 6:6-8

With what shall I come before the
LORD
and bow down before the
exalted God?
Shall I come before him with
burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with
thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my
transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin
of my soul?
He has showed you, O man,
what is good.

14 Your New Moon festivals and
your appointed feasts
my soul hates.
They have become a burden
to me;
I am weary of bearing them.
15 When you spread out your
hands in prayer,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even if you offer many
prayers,
I will not listen.
Your hands are full of blood;
16 wash and make yourselves
clean.
Take your evil deeds
out of my sight!
Stop doing wrong,
17 learn to do right!
Seek justice,
encourage the oppressed.
Defend the cause of the
fatherless,
plead the case of the widow.

And what does the LORD
require of you?
To act justly and to love
mercy
and to walk humbly with your
God.

Joel 2:13

13 Rend your heart
and not your garments.
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and
compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding
in love,
and he relents from sending
calamity.

⁹"Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to
Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰and then come and stand
before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to
do all these detestable things? ¹¹Has this house, which bears my Name, become
a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD."

Jer.7:9-11

Ps. 116:12-19

- ¹² How can I repay the LORD
for all his goodness to me?
¹³ I will lift up the cup of
salvation
and call on the name of the
LORD.
¹⁴ I will fulfill my vows to the
LORD
in the presence of all his
people.
¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the
LORD
is the death of his saints.
¹⁶ O LORD, truly I am your
servant;

I am your servant, the son of
your maidservant;
you have freed me from my
chains.

- ¹⁷ I will sacrifice a thank offering
to you
and call on the name of the
LORD.
¹⁸ I will fulfill my vows to the
LORD
in the presence of all his
people,
¹⁹ in the courts of the house of
the LORD—
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD.

¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy[□] met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴When he saw them, he said, "**Go, show yourselves to the priests.**" And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷Jesus asked, "**Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?** ¹⁸**Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?**" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "**Rise and go; your faith has made you well.**" Luke 17:11-16

Melodies from the Heart of a Worshipper - Praise

Reflections on Worship

Jon Piper commenting on John 4 – worship in spirit and truth: Worship must be vital and real in the heart, and worship must rest on a true perception of God.

Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full (or half full) of artificial admirers. On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought.

Praise

Psalms 117; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Peter 2:9; Acts 2:46; Rev. 5:13

What, then, can we say about praise:

- God commands praise.
- Praise is the goal of all God does.
- All of his creation praises him.
- God's people are created to praise Him.

"Praising God is the highest calling of humanity and our eternal vocation."

What is Praise?

To proclaim merit or worth... Compliment, approval or the giving of honor...

The above definition is inadequate. Praise as we are considering it is better defined as follows:

"Praise soars above the prosaic language of obedience, command and obligation. Praise is an expression of abundance rather than need, a time when we are able to say with the psalmist 'my cup runneth over.' Praise arises like laughter, spontaneously, welling up within us until we can sit and be silent no longer. "

With Glad and Generous Hearts by William H. Willimon

C. S. Lewis "A Word About Praise" from Reflection on the Psalms

Lewis says that as he was beginning to believe in God, a great stumbling block was the presence of demands scattered through the Psalms that he should praise God. He did not see the point in all this; besides, it seemed to picture God as craving "for our worship like a vain woman who wants compliments." He goes on to show why he was wrong.

But the most obvious fact about praise- whether of God or anything--strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise. The world rings with praise -- lovers praising their mistresses, readers

their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game...
I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.

Praise is an affection of the heart.

Some "facts" about praise:

- o **Praise emanates from that which we value.**

Expanding further from C. S. Lewis' "A Word on Praise":

I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious, minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least

I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?" The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value.

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- o **Praise cannot be duty.**

Piper comments:

Consider the analogy of a wedding anniversary. Mine is on December 21. Suppose on this day I bring home a dozen long-stemmed red roses for Noel. When she meets me at the door I hold out the roses, and she says, "O Johnny, they're beautiful, thank you," and gives me a big hug. Then suppose I hold up my hand and say matter-of-factly, "Don't mention it; it's my duty"

What happens? Is not the exercise of duty a noble thing? Do not we honor those we dutifully serve? Not much. Not if there's no heart in it. Dutiful roses are a contradiction in terms, if I am not moved by a spontaneous affection for her as a person, the roses do not honor her. In fact they belittle her. They

are a very thin covering for the fact that she does not have the worth or beauty in my eyes to kindle affection. All I can muster is a calculated expression of marital duty.

Here is the way Edward John Camell puts it:

Suppose a husband asks his wife if he must kiss her good night. Her answer is, "You must, but not that kind of a must." What she means is this: "Unless a spontaneous affection for my person motivates you, your overtures are stripped of all moral value."

- **Praise cannot be manufactured. It is an affection of the heart.**

Consider the words Psalms 34:1 written by David. Take some time to reflect upon the circumstances in which he wrote this psalm. Also read Job 1:20-21. The response of praise that Job gave God as well as David's praise in the context of their lives are certainly proof that praise cannot be manufactured.

John Piper writes:

If what transforms outward ritual into authentic worship is the quickening of the heart's affections, then true worship cannot be performed as a means to some other experience. Feelings are not like that. Genuine feelings of the heart cannot be manufactured as stepping stones to something else.

For example: My brother-in-law called me long-distance in 1974 to tell me my mother had just been killed. I recall his breaking voice as I took the phone from my wife: "Johnny, this is Bob, good buddy I've got bad news... Your mother and dad were in a serious bus accident. Your mom didn't make it, and your dad is hurt bad."

One thing is for sure. When I hear news like that, I do not sit down and say, "Now to what end shall I feel grief?." As I pull my baby son off my leg and hand him to my wife and walk to the bedroom to be alone, I do not say, "What good end can I accomplish if I cry for the next half-hour?" The feeling of grief is an end in itself, as far as my conscious motivation is concerned.

It is there spontaneously. It is not performed as a means to anything else. It is not consciously willed. It is not decided upon. It comes from deep within, from a place beneath the conscious will. It will no doubt have many byproducts- most of them good. But that is utterly beside the point as I kneel by my bed and weep. The feeling is there, bursting out of my heart. And it is an end in itself.

When you stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon for the first time and watch the setting sun

send the darkness down through the geological layers of time, you do not say, "Now to what end shall I feel awe and wonder before this beauty?"

When a little child on Christmas morning opens his first gift and finds his "most favoritest" rocket that he has wanted for months, he does not think, "Now to what end shall I feel happy and thankful?" We call a person an ingrate when words of gratitude are dutifully forced instead of coming spontaneously from the heart.

When a five-year-old enters kindergarten and starts getting picked on by some second-graders, and his big fourth-grade brother comes over and takes his side, he does not "decide" to feel confidence and love welling up in his little heart. He just does.

All genuine emotion is an end in itself. It is not consciously caused as a means to something else.

- o **Praise is not merely an expression of, but is the consummation of our joy and happiness.**

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.

John Piper summarizes it in the following way:

We praise what we enjoy because the delight is incomplete until it is expressed in praise. If we were not allowed to speak of what we value, and celebrate what we love, and praise what we admire, our joy would not be full. So if God loves us enough to make our joy full, he must not only give us himself; he must also win from us the praise of our hearts --not because he needs to shore up some weakness in himself or compensate for some deficiency, but because he loves us and seeks the fullness of our joy that can be found only in knowing and praising him, the most magnificent of all Beings.

Pascal wrote:

There once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.

We have sought God to fill that void. We have found true happiness in God's gift of grace and the fullness of our joy can only be complete in our praise of God. Moreover, it is in our praise of His excellence that God finds the climax of his happiness.

Possible reasons for not praising God:

- **We do not value Him.**
- **Our relationship with God is based on duty not love.**
- **A misconception about desiring our own good .**

C. S. Lewis presents a perspective that challenges my thinking.

If you asked twenty good men today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire.

If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Let us consider rethinking this matter.

If praise truly originates from our affection of heart for the one we value highest and that praise is the consummation of our joy and happiness, a belief that whatever is for our own good is bad will not consent to praise.

A final point... Romans 2: 28-29.

²⁸A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

For the Christian, their praise is not from men but from God.

Melodies from the Heart of a Worshipper

- Thanksgiving

Reflection on Worship

Pascal wrote:

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Praise is the laughter of our soul in response to God's gifts.

Thanksgiving (Gratitude)

Praise and thanksgiving are mutually inclusive. In scripture, we seldom find the mention of thanksgiving without reference to praise either explicitly or implicitly. They are like ... grace and mercy... faith and works... compassion and kindness ... the terms are connected but distinctive in their own right. This lesson is intended to help us understand thanksgiving and its relationship to praise.

"The only appropriate human response to God's acts in nature and history is genuine heartfelt thanksgiving."

John T. Willis

The Old Testament, particularly the Psalms, is replete with expressions of thanksgiving and admonition to give thanks. A few examples are:

Ps 136:1-4

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures forever.

to him who alone does great wonders,

His love endures forever.

Ps 118:28-29

You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

1 Chron. 16:8-13

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.
Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
Look to the LORD and his strength;
seek his face always.
Remember the wonders he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,
O descendants of Israel his servant,
sons of Jacob, his chosen ones.

Ps 7:17

I will give thanks to the LORD
because of his righteousness
and will sing praise
to the name of the LORD Most High.

Ps 30:11-12

You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing to you and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

Ps 106:47-48

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.
Praise be to the LORD,
the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD.

The New Testament places thanksgiving in the context of God's grace revealed in the ministry, death, burial and resurrection of Christ and the subsequent daily lives His people ... the church.

Jesus, the Son of God, gave thanks to His Father, as he broke bread to feed the hungry, as he raised the dead and as he shared the bread and the wine at the last supper.

The response of healed leper, a model for worship, exposes both praise and thanksgiving.

Luke 17:15-16

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him-- and he was a Samaritan.

The purpose of grace preached is thanksgiving:

2 Cor 4:15

All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

Generous gifts bring thanksgiving:

2 Cor 9:10-12

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

The alternative to evil conduct for God's holy people is simply thanksgiving:

Eph 5:3-4

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

We are to be thankful for everything, in everything and in all circumstances:

Eph 5:19-20

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.

Col 1:10-12

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Col 3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Col 3:17

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

1Thes 5:16-18

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Thanksgiving, shares the character of its companion praise, in that it cannot be duty nor can it be commanded. (cf the Pharisee in Luke 18:10-14)

Thomas Merton wrote:

"Gratitude ... is more than a mental exercise, more than a formula of words. We cannot be satisfied to make a mental note of things which God has done for us and then perfunctorily thank Him for favors received."ⁱ

Thanksgiving, thanksgiving. All must be thanksgiving.

It took thirty-eight thousand Levites to give thanks to God in David's day; every morning and every evening the shifts changed. Four thousand were needed just to carry the hacked carcasses of cattle, and another four thousand were needed to sing about it. The place reeked of blood, was soaked in blood. The priests stood around gnawing and chewing and giving thanks. They did not cross-stitch their gratitude on samplers to frame and hang on the wall. They wrote their thanks in blood on the doorposts every day.ⁱⁱ

In 1636 during the Thirty Years War--one of the worst wars in the history of mankind in terms of the sheer number of deaths, epidemics, the economic results--there was a godly pastor whose name was Martin Rinkert. In a single year, this pastor buried 5,000 people in his parish--about fifteen a day. He lived with the worst that life could do.

But if you look in your hymnal, you'll find that in the middle of that time, he wrote a table grace for his children, our thanksgiving hymn:

"Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom his world rejoices."

If I'd spent the year holding 5,000 funerals of the people I served, could I write for my children a song of thanksgiving? It's an unusual thing that in history many who have the least to thank God about thank him the most.ⁱⁱⁱ

When stripped of the adequacy of a perfunctory “thank you” and faced with a call to be thankful for everything, and every circumstance, the desire for a deeper understanding of what it means to be thankful becomes compelling.

The book, *The Spirituality of Imperfection*^{iv}, provides some challenging insights on gratitude (thanksgiving). I believe a few of those ideas can greatly assist us in our quest to understand thanksgiving more fully.

There are three particular concepts we will examine:
Gift... Vision ... Attitude

Gift

Gratitude can be but defined and understood as the only, and only possible, response to a gift, to something recognized as utterly, freely given. No one is as capable of gratitude as the one who has emerged from the kingdom of darkness.

There can be no gratitude without the gift. For that reason our society is on the verge of losing the meaning of the experience of gratitude because we have lost the sense of “gift”.

Vision

Gratitude is not a feeling but an on-going vision of thank-fulness that recognizes the gifts constantly received. A feeling is fleeting, an emotion for the moment; gratitude is a mind-set, a way of seeing and thinking that is rooted in remembrance – the remembrance of being without the gift. Gratitude is the “vision” that sees the gift and recognizes how gift-ed we are.

Those who seek to be spiritual see reality different. It is not that they see things others cannot see; but rather that they see what everyone else sees, but in seeing recognize in all reality its aspect of gift.

Attitude

The “attitude of gratitude”...

An attitude is a posture, a way of positioning not only our body our selves. Standing, sitting and lying down are attitudes, each of which makes something possible. When I stand I can see farther, I can walk, I can run, etc. ... When I am grateful, I can receive.

Implications and Conclusions about Thanksgiving

- **Recognition and proper understanding of God’s grace is essential.**

There can be no thanksgiving without a gift. God, our creator, is The Giver. He is God. All that we have and can hope for is a gift from God. The culmination of God’s gifts is found in Christ. Therefore thanksgiving

(gratitude) is an irrefutable measure of the nature and character of God's people. (cf Romans 1:21-25)

- **Thanksgiving cannot coexist with pride.**

Pride will not permit a gift to be received. Only the humble will have heart-centered gratitude (cf the Pharisee and sinner Luke 18:10-14).

Pride slays thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grows. A proud man is seldom a grateful man; he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.

Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887)

To thank with all your heart is an art--an art which the Holy Spirit teaches. And you need not worry that the man who can really say "Deo gratias" (to God be thanks) with all his heart will be proud, stubborn, rough, and tough, or will work against God with His gifts.

Martin Luther in What Luther Says.

Christianity Today, Vol. 31, no. 17.

A man who truly responds to the goodness of God and acknowledges all that he has received, cannot possibly be a half-hearted Christian. True gratitude and hypocrisy cannot exist together. They are totally incompatible. Gratitude of itself makes us sincere--or if it does not, then it is not true gratitude.

Thomas Merton

- **The fuel of the fire of thanksgiving is remembrance of being without the gift.**

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. Deut. 8:17-18

When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me. Hosea 13:6

A true Christian is a man who never for a moment forgets what God has done for him in Christ, and whose whole comportment and whole activity have their root in the sentiment of gratitude.

John Baillie (1741-1806)

- **Thanksgiving is not dependent upon circumstances.**
(cf I Thess. 5:16-18)

Gratitude for God's gifts transcends all of life's circumstances because God's gifts are greater than life. Mother Teresa said it this way: *"The best way to show my gratitude to God is to accept everything, even my problems, with joy".*

Gratitude in everything, for everything, and in all circumstances is possible because thanksgiving is

not a feeling but a mind-set that constantly remembers being without God's gift.

- **Thanksgiving is itself a gift from God.**

Col 1:10-12

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Summary

If praise is the laughter of our soul in response to God's gifts; then thanksgiving is our soul's remembrance of being without God's gifts.

ⁱ From *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton

ⁱⁱ From *And the Trees Clap Their Hands* by Virginia Stem Owens

ⁱⁱⁱ Joel Gregory, "The Unlikely Thanker," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 110.

^{iv} *The Spirituality of Imperfection* by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham

Melodies from the Heart of a Worshipper

- Remembrance

Reflection on Worship

Praise and thanksgiving are mutually inclusive.

"The only appropriate human response to God's acts in nature and history is genuine heartfelt thanksgiving."

John T. Willis

Thanksgiving, shares the character of its companion praise, in that it cannot be duty nor can it be commanded. (cf the Pharisee in Luke 18:10-14)

Remembrance

When we mention remembrance as an element of worship, most often the first response is to think of the Lord's Supper and Jesus' instruction "do this in remembrance of me". That certainly is the most prominent and most recognized incorporation of remembrance in our corporate worship experience.

An understanding of the nature and character of praise and thanksgiving reveals their relationship to remembrance. Praise, as the laughter of our souls in response to God's gifts, presumes our remembrance of those gifts. Thanksgiving is our soul's remembrance of being without God's gifts. With this understanding we can see that the mutual inclusiveness of praise and thanksgiving extends to remembrance. Remembrance permeates our total worship experience.

The emphasis Scripture places on remembrance reflects an understanding of the human propensity to forget and underscores the importance of remembrance. It also presumes the truth expressed by Baal Shem Tov: "Salvation lies in remembrance". God's creation of the rainbow... tassels on the garments of the priests... twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan river ...the Passover... the Lord's Supper... all serve remembrance of God's saving acts in history. The people of Israel in the Old Testament are vivid examples of our common inclination to forget who we are and where we have come from.

Ps 78:9-11

The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law.

They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.

Ps 106:7-14

When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your

*many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.
Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known.
He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert.
He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them.
The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived.
Then they believed his promises and sang his praise.
But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.
In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test.*

Sir Thomas More said, "The world does not need so much to be informed as to be reminded." So the Bible says again and again "Forget not!" and "Remember! Remember! Remember!"

-- Rufus M. Jones in *The Double Search*.

The Psalms are filled with references to remembering. Remembrance is a major theme of the book of Deuteronomy.

Deut 4:9

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

(cf. 4:10,23,31; 5:15; 6:12,18; 8:2,11,14,18-19; 9:7,27; 11:2,15; 16:3,12; 24:9,18,22; 24:22;25:19;32:7)

Remembrance of God's graciousness in the gift of His Son is the focal point of remembrance in the New Testament.

Luke 22:19

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

2 Tim. 2:7-8

Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel...

2 Peter 1:12-15

*So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.
I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body,
because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.*

And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

A Theology of Remembrance

In the simplest form, there are two basic types of human long-term memory ...

Episodic memory – our memory of events and experiences in serial form.

Semantic memory – a structured record of facts, concepts and skills that we have acquired.

Remembrance as an element of worship incorporates both types of memory. In my experience, remembrance in worship has been most often characterized by the retrieval of information and facts (semantic). i.e. Memorization of Scripture. This is not only appropriate it is essential.

The Psalmists said:

"I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago."

Psalms 77:11

"I remember your ancient laws, O LORD, and I find comfort in them."

Ps 119:52

However, a brief examination of Scripture reveals that remembrance is more often related to the episodic memory.

Deut 4:9

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Deut 32:7

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.

Psalms 42:3-4

My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Ps 63:3-8

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

Ps 77:1-7

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me.

When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.

I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah

You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.

I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;

I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

"Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?"

Matt 5:23-24

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Eph 2:10-12

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Jesus statement "do this in remembrance of me" is not instruction to just recall facts and circumstances. We are to remember the person, Jesus... the one with whom we have a personal and meaningful relationship. Who of us wants the memory of ourselves to be the facts of our existence.

Frederick Buechner writes:

"There are two ways of remembering. One is to make an excursion from the living present into the dead past. ... The other way is to summon the dead past back into the living present. The young widow remembers her husband, and he is there beside her.

When Jesus said, 'Do this in remembrance of me' he was not prescribing a periodic slug of nostalgia."

The path of the dead into the living present is not through recitation but by way of story. God wants his people

to tell their story. (cf. Deut. 4:9;) As Christians we are not observers but participants. We can declare as the Psalmist:

Ps 78:1-7

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old--

what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

As participants in God's saving acts, we remember by telling our stories.

...storytelling involves not dogma or commandment, not things to be done or truths to be believed, not theory, conjecture, argument, analysis, or explanation, but a way of conversation shared by those who accept and identify with their own imperfection.

For once upon a time, people told stories. In the midst of sorrow and in the presence of joy, both mourners and celebrants told stories. But especially in times of trouble, when "a miracle" was needed and the limits of human ability were reached, people turned to storytelling as a way of exploring the fundamental mysteries: Who are we? Why are we? How are we to live?

These most basic questions are spiritual questions, and so the stories that people told concerned spirituality. They also concerned imperfection--the limits experienced by those subject to failures of knowing and to other "unables" and "cannots." Without imperfection's "gap between intentions and results," there would be no story.

Listening to stories and telling them helped our ancestors to live humanly--to be human. But somewhere along the way our ability to tell (and to listen to) stories was lost. As life speeded up, as the possibility of both communication and annihilation became ever more instantaneous, people came to have less tolerance for that which comes only over time. The demand for perfection and the craving for ever more control over a world that paradoxically seemed ever more out of control eventually bred impatience with story. As time went by, the art of storytelling fell by the wayside, and those who went before us gradually lost part of what had been the human heritage--the ability to ask the most basic questions, the spiritual questions.¹

For the Christian, a theology of remembrance must not only incorporate the retrieval and recital of facts and information; it must also reflect the reality of participation and the expression of story.

¹ The Spirituality of Imperfection

Melodies from the Heart of a Worshipper

- Sacrifice

Reflection on Worship

A Theology of Remembrance

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Sacrifice

When we hear “sacrifice”, I suspect what comes to mind is as Oswald Chambers described: “Our notion of sacrifice is the wringing out of us something we don't want to give up, full of pain and agony and distress. “ To hold such an idea of sacrifice becomes a significant problem when we realize that an essential element of worship is sacrifice. Understanding worship to embody praise, thanksgiving and remembrance establishes an irreconcilable conflict with the idea of sacrifice as a negative and painful experience. It is the purpose of this study to understand nature and character of sacrifice as an element of worship.

Sacrifice has its origins in the primitive ages of humanity and is found in all the nations of antiquity. In scripture, sacrifice appears with the account of Cain and Abel. Noah and other patriarchs were in the habit of building altars and offering sacrifices. (cf. Gen. 8:20; 12:7; 13:4; 26:25; 31:54; 33:20; 35:7; 46:1)

“Indeed, *to sacrifice* seems as natural to man as to pray; the one indicates what he feels about himself, the other what he feels about God. The one means a felt need of *propitiation*, the other a felt sense of *dependence*” (Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 81).

Sacrifices do not appear to have been instituted at first by divine command; though they must not, on that account, be looked upon as human inventions. They are the spontaneous expressions, so natural to man as the offspring of God, of reverence and gratitude which he feels toward him. But we must not fail to note that with gratitude and reverence there was also the thought of securing a continuance of God's favor and mercy. Nor must we lose sight of their expressing the idea of propitiation and substitution. ... In the presentation of the best of his possessions the worshipper symbolized the giving of himself, his life, his aims, to God. (Unger's Bible Dictionary pg. 942-3)

MOSAIC LAW SACRIFICE

To understand sacrifice as an element of worship it is necessary to understand sacrifice in the Mosaic Law. As mentioned earlier, sacrifice under the Mosaic Law was instituted to fulfill the command of God that his people not come before him empty-handed. In the Old Testament no religious act was considered complete unless accompanied by sacrifice. The regulations and requirements were detailed and complex.

There were two general categories of sacrifices: propitiatory offerings and fellowship offerings. The propitiatory sacrifices consisted of sin and trespass offerings. It was through these offerings that the grace of God was bestowed in the atonement of the sins of the people and assured their relationship with Jehovah.

Fellowship sacrifices consisted of burnt offerings, peace offerings including thank, votive, freewill and meat and drink offerings. Fellowship sacrifices, which reflect the reality of communion with God, could never be offered unless propitiatory sacrifice was offered first.

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

Heb 10:5-14

*Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:
"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body
you prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not
pleased.*

*Then I said, 'Here I am-- it is written about me in the
scroll—*

*I have come to do your will, O God."
First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin
offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with
them" (although the law required them to be made). Then
he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets
aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we
have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of
Jesus Christ once for all.*

*Day after day every priest stands and performs his
religious duties; again and again he offers the same*

sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Christ's death is the end of all sacrifices made by men to appease God. The sacrifice of Christ is not an offering of outward gifts, fruits or animals; Christ sacrifices himself, makes a personal offering of him self. Christ's death is the end of all sacrifices of atonement. (Hans Kung)

CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE

God expects and is deserving of sacrifice. The fundamental principle upon which Old Testament sacrifices were instituted, "No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed: Each of you must bring in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you" (Deut. 16:16-17), is universal to the people of God. The following passages reflect the continuation of this principle in the New Testament.

Rom 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

1Pet 2:4-5, 9

As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Spiritual Sacrifices – The unique sacrifice of Christ fulfils all the priestly sacrifices of atonement and makes them superfluous. But all believers in the new covenant have to make sacrifices which were part of the old covenant and which the prophets regarded as higher than all the material sacrifices prescribed by the law (cf. Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8): prayer, praise and thanksgiving, penitence, justice, kindness, love, the knowledge of God. The priesthood of the believers of the new covenant is expected to make spiritual sacrifices, sacrifices wrought by the Spirit: "... a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). According to Paul the Christian must offer his life "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship". (Rom 12:1)

...we can see that man is not to offer something external, but is to offer and sacrifice himself: not as atonement but as praise and thanksgiving for the gift of

salvation. Unlike the priest of the old dispensation he need have no anxiety about whether his offering is pleasing to God, on the contrary, he can know from the first that his sacrifice will be accepted by God, since it is not made by himself alone, but "through Jesus Christ" (Hans Kung)

Phil 4:18

I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Heb 13:15-16

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.

PRINCIPLES OF SACRIFICE

- **Worship and sacrifice are inseparable.**

Worship is response to God and sacrifice is response.

Without sacrifice there can be no worship.

- **We cannot come before God empty-handed.**

Exodus 34:29, Deut. 16:16

- **Our spiritual sacrifices cannot be offered unless sin has been atoned.**

- **Sacrifice is about costly giving.**

Mark 8:34; Matt. 19:21; Luke 21:2; Phil. 2:5-7

- **Our sacrifice must be our best... holy, clean and perfect.**

The assurance of acceptability is our hearts and the name of Jesus.

- **Sacrifice is about gaining not losing.**

Mark 10:28-31

- **We are to be "Joyfully sacrificial".**

Phil. 3:7-10; 2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 8:18;

Jesus assumes the longing for true life and that it will motivate us to deny ourselves all lesser pleasures and comforts of life. (John Piper, Desiring God)

It is clear that a sacrifice must consist of praise and thanks, or must at least not be without praise and thanks, if it is to please God. And if it is without praise and thanks, He neither wants nor likes it, as indeed He says (Isa. 1:11): What is your sacrificing to Me? I do not want your offering of incense. We cannot give God anything; for everything is already His, and all we have comes from Him. We can only give Him praise, thanks, and honor.

Martin Luther, from What Luther Says. Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 17.

Melodies from the Heart of a Worshipper

- Confession

Reflection on Worship

God expects and is deserving of sacrifice. The fundamental principle upon which Old Testament sacrifices were instituted, "No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed: Each of you must bring in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you" (Deut. 16:16-17), is universal to the people of God.

Confession

There can be no worship unless there is confession.

C. Weldon Gaddy in his book *The Gift of Worship* says that worship demands confession at all costs. ...Continuing in worship beyond the confession of sins is impossible if the sins are not forgivable.

Lev 5:5-6

"When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.

Lev 16:20-22

"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites-- all their sins-- and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

Psalms 51:16-17

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Matt 5:23-24

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

1 Jn 1:8-10

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all

unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

As we continue our study of the elements of worship, it is becoming clearer that worship is not the sum of a series of discreet components. Worship is incarnate; elements that can be defined and seen but which cannot be separated from the whole. We cannot pick and choose which aspect of worship we want to adopt for our pleasure.

With this understanding, we can accept the statement "There can be no worship unless there is confession" without falling prey to diminishing other elements of worship and making confession our exclusive focus in worship.

Confession of Sin and Guilt

The wise man said, *"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."* (Prov. 28:13) Confession is the door through which we pass to find relationship with God. It is the first step in our journey to spirituality.

Only when we recognize our imperfection will we cease to live in the illusion of perfection. Like Eve, we want to be God. Confession of our imperfection destroys that illusion and brings us into the light of truth... we are imperfect and only God can save us.

Isa 6:1-7

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. "At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away".

Confession cannot be consigned to a checklist. It is not sufficient to intellectually acknowledge the reality of our imperfection. Kurtz and Ketcham in *The Spirituality of Imperfection*

provide a glimpse of character of confession:

"...spirituality begins as an expression of what in human be-ing is incurable by human efforts. It is an

expression: not a philosophical or psychological description, not a theory, belief, opinion or judgment, not dogma or doctrine or creed but *expression* – a howl of pain, a cry for help squeezed out of one's human core. "Lord save me, whether I like it or not".

Luke 18:13

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

Jesus said that true worshippers would worship in spirit and truth. Confession is about truth. It acknowledges the truth about our selves and the truth about God. Lies are the substance of evil. Satan is the father of lies. To live in truth we must first be honest with our selves. To confess our sin is to be honest.

Darrell Tippens in a lecture on worship made a dramatic and provoking point about confession of sin: **God only attends church where the truth is told.**

A Barrier to Confession of Sin

Why don't we confess our sins? Scripture is explicit about confessing our sin " ... confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed". There are many excuses to be offered... risk, embarrassment, and inappropriateness. I believe the core of the absence of confession in our worship is more closely related to the problem described by Kurtz and Ketcham:

The modern mind tends to view problems from the perspective: "If it is wrong, it can be fixed". The corollary runs: "If we cannot fix it, then there must be nothing wrong".

Confession runs contrary to our modern mind-set. We are not so much interested in confessing as we are in getting it fixed. The assumption is that solution is in our hands. If I cannot fix it then God will not hold me responsible.

Henri Nowen wrote about the problem of living in a rich society that explains, in part, why confession of sin is rare.

One of the temptations of the upper-middle-class is to create large gray areas between good and evil. Wealth takes away the sharp edges of our moral sensitivities and allows a comfortable confusion about sin and virtue. The difference between rich and poor is not that the rich sin more than the poor, but that the rich find it easier to call sin a virtue. When the poor sin, they call it a sin; when they see holiness, they identify it as such. This intuitive clarity is often absent from the wealthy, and that absence easily leads to the atrophy of the moral sense.

"Confess your faults one to another" (James 5:16). He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final break-through to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everyone must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners!

--From *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

What happens when we confess our sins?

- Confession brings forgiveness.
- Confession brings an end to pretense.
- Confession enables change.
- Confession releases the power that heals.
- Confession enables fellowship.

Confession of Faith

In addition to confession of sin and guilt, scripture talks about confession as profession of faith.

Rom. 10:8-11

"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Confession of sin and guilt is the child of thanksgiving. Our remembrance of being without God's gifts also reminds us... our sin separated us from God and we were slaves to sin.

If confession of sin and guilt is the child of thanksgiving, confession of faith in God is the child of praise. The confession of our faith in God through Jesus Christ is founded on God's gifts from which our praise flows like laughter from our soul.

If there can be no worship without confession of sin and guilt, neither can worship be complete without our confession of faith.

"There is also in it (confession that Jesus is Lord) the strongest bond to secure the affections of all Christians to one another. There is no other confession of faith on which the church can be built, on which it can possibly stand one and undivided, but on this one."

Alexander Campbell- *The Christian System*

Matt. 16:15-18

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

Confession of faith is not a private matter. Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."

Confession demands change: ... "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." (2 Tim. 2:19)

1 Tim 6:12-16

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time-- God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Melodies from the Heart of a Worshipper

- Proclamation

Reflection on Worship

There can be no worship unless there is confession.

C. Weldon Gaddy in his book *The Gift of Worship* says that worship demands confession at all costs. ...Continuing in worship beyond the confession of sins is impossible if the sins are not forgivable.

Worship is not the sum of a series of discreet components. Worship is incarnate; elements that can be defined and seen but which cannot be separated from the whole. We cannot pick and choose which aspect of worship we want to adopt for our pleasure.

Confession cannot be consigned to a checklist. It is not sufficient to intellectually acknowledge the reality of our imperfection.

Jesus said that true worshippers would worship in spirit and truth. Confession is about truth. It acknowledges the truth about our selves and the truth about God. Lies are the substance of evil. Satan is the father of lies. To live in truth we must first be honest with our selves. To confess our sin is to be honest.

God only attends church where the truth is told.

Confession of sin and guilt is the child of thanksgiving. Our remembrance of being without God's gifts also reminds us... our sin separated us from God and we were slaves to sin.

If confession of sin and guilt is the child of thanksgiving, confession of faith in God is the child of praise. The confession of our faith in God through Jesus Christ is founded on God's gifts from which our praise flows like laughter from our soul.

If there can be no worship without confession of sin and guilt, neither can worship be complete without our confession of faith.

Proclamation

INTRODUCTION

It is important to note that our class outline indicated that our next element of worship to be examined would be teaching. In the process of lesson preparation, it became clear that proclamation is a more appropriate description of this particular element of worship. Teaching, as well as preaching, is a means of proclamation and does not individually communicate the concept of proclamation as an element of worship.

We need to continue to be aware that we are examining these elements of worship as they relate to worship in the broadest sense, i.e. worship as all of our life.

(cf. Rom. 12:1) Teaching and preaching most often are relegated to a specific context of worship. This should not diminish the importance of either but simply recognizes them as means and methods, not ends within them selves.

The presupposition of our study is that there are fundamental elements of worship that form the character of worship. Understanding these elements will help give us a deeper sense of the fullness of worship and provide a foundation for expressing worship in any context.

PROCLAMATION

Proclamation as defined is ...to announce publicly or officially.

As defined in our first lesson, worship is response, and the God to be responded to in worship is the God whose grace deserves gratitude. Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare His worth. It is about giving to God in recognition of what we have received or are receiving.

Proclamation as worship then, can be defined as: ...to announce publicly or officially God's gracious gifts. Consistent with our understanding of worship as response, proclamation, as an element of worship, is a response not a command or duty.

PROCLAMATION AS RESPONSE

Proclamation is a natural human response. The Old Testament reveals a heart-centered response of proclamation by those who encountered Yahweh.

Deut 32:1-3

Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear,

O earth, the words of my mouth.

Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew,

like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants.

I will proclaim the name of the LORD.

Oh, praise the greatness of our God!

Ps 40:8-10

I desire to do your will, O my God;

your law is within my heart."

I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly;

I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD.

I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;

I speak of your faithfulness and salvation.

I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.

Ps 51:12-15

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and

grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,

and sinners will turn back to you.

*Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
Ps 71:15-18*

*My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all
day long,
though I know not its measure.
I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign
LORD;*

*I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.
Since my youth, O God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.
Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your might to all who are to come.*

*Ps 96:1-3
Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*

*Isa 6:5-8
"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of
unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and
my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

*Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in
his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With
it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched
your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."
Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I
send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send
me!"*

*Isa. 12:4-6
In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his
name; make known among the nations what he has done,
and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for
he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the
world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great
is the Holy One of Israel among you."*

Proclamation is prominent in the New Testament. Not only is it seen in Jesus teaching but also in those who receive the God's grace.

Matt 5:13-16

*"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its
saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer
good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled
by men."*

*"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot
be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under*

a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Matt. 10:27

What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.

Mark 16:15

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

Mark 1:40-45

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news.

Matt 9:27-31

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

"Yes, Lord," they replied.

Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

Acts 5:42

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

Acts 8:4

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Proclamation is our nature as Christians. Hans Kung in his book, *The Church*, writes about Christians as the priesthood of all believers and its implication on preaching the word.

The priesthood of all believers includes not only the witness of actions, of one's whole life spent in loving self-sacrifice, but also the specific witness of the word (cf. Heb. 13: 15). The preaching of the word of God is entrusted to all, not just to a few: "But you are . . . a royal priesthood . . . that you

may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9). This preaching is not only performed in good conduct (2:12) but also in words: "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (3:15). ...The primary command which Jesus gives to his disciples is that of preaching the message of salvation (Mk. 1:35-38; 16:15; Mt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; I Cor. 1:17). This explains why there is such a variety of words in the New Testament, around thirty different terms, to describe the activity of preaching: proclaim, announce, preach, teach, explain, speak, say, testify, persuade, confess, charge, admonish. The variety of different kinds of preaching allows each and every one to make his contribution towards the preaching of the message.

...The Christian message spread with such speed from the very first because it was proclaimed by all, according to their gifts and opportunities, and not just by a few with a special commission.

...Every believer can and must, having received the word of God, be its herald in some form or other. Every Christian is called to be a preacher of the word, in the widest sense, even though, in view of the variety of the gifts of the Spirit, not everyone can by any means do everything. All are called to preach the Gospel in the sense of their personal Christian witness, without being all called to preach, in the narrow sense of the word or to be theologians.

Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* writes: "...God has put this Word into the mouths of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs the brother as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation.

As with the previous elements of worship, proclamation is distinct but inseparable from other elements of worship. We cannot receive and acknowledge the gifts of God without praise, thanksgiving, remembrance and confession. Likewise, proclamation is a natural and undeniable response that characterizes our spiritual act of worship, the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice.

PROCLAMATION AS WORSHIP

Worship is proclamation--all of it, at least implicitly. Proclamation is a part of worship--a major part of it explicitly. In worship and through worship, the great truths of the Bible are proclaimed by words and actions...

In worship and through worship, the story of redemption is told and retold, and a strange thing happens. At first worshipers hear the bad news about human sin and the good news of God's grace singularly, intimately, as if the whole of salvation history has taken place for each of them individually. Then comes an awareness of the larger community and a vision of the inclusiveness of God's gracious action. Suddenly, there is an urge to shout the good news to others, a compulsion toward a cosmic exclamation. What worship proclaims to worshipers, worshipers desire to proclaim to the world. (The Gift of Worship – C. Welton Gaddy)

To understand proclamation as worship it is important that we think of proclamation beyond the ministry of preaching. Preaching is only one method of proclamation. An exclusive focus on preaching as the THE method for proclaiming the Good News is inconsistent with scripture and does not provide an appropriate understanding of worship. What we are concerned with here is, as Bonhoeffer describes it, "...the free communication of the Word from person to person, not by the ordained ministry which is bound to a particular office, time and place".

POSSIBLE INHIBITORS TO PROCLAMATION

- **No gift has been received or has been forgotten.** Unless we have received Good News there will be no Good News to proclaim.
- **Fear.** (cf. John 12:42, John 7:12-13) Faith has not come to fullness when fear of the consequences of proclaiming our faith stifles our voices.
- **Misunderstanding of Christian responsibility to proclaim Jesus Christ.** There is a prevailing view that proclamation is confined to preaching. We tend to think of preaching as a vocation, happening in a particular fashion in a particular place. "It's not my job"!

IMPLICATIONS OF PROCLAMATION AS AN ELEMENT OF WORSHIP

- **Worship is incomplete without proclamation.**
- **Proclamation is public... clear and objective.**
- **Proclamation is a valid barometer of our faith.**
- **Proclamation is not an option.**

Our responsibility to proclaim Jesus Christ cannot be fulfilled through duty or obligation.

Melodies from the Heart of a Worshipper

- Petitions & Requests

Petitions & Requests

INTRODUCTION

When petitions and requests and worship are mentioned we immediately think of prayer. Prayer is the vehicle by which petitions and requests are offered. Petitions and requests are prayers but not all prayers are petitions and requests.

For our purposes, petition is to be understood as our personal desires. Requests are intercession, appeals on behalf of others.

A fundamental aspect of worship is that its character and nature is dictated by the nature and character of the object worshipped. Therefore it is essential that we seek to understand God so that our worship to Him will be acceptable and appropriate.

To understand the importance of petitions and requests as worship to God, we must reconcile them with our understanding that worship is about honoring and adoring ... sacrifice ... giving not receiving. How can petitions and requests be worship? Aren't we elevating self-interest above the adoration and honor that God deserves? Isn't worship about "...presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice"? What authority or right do we have to come to God on the behalf of others?

The answer to these and other questions, which arise when we consider petitions and requests as worship, lies in our understanding of God and worship as response to Him.

PETITIONS AND REQUESTS AS WORSHIP

God is Love

God loves us. Because he loves us he wants us to call on Him. God says to us what so often we say to those we love, "Call any time, I'm always available." One response that God desires is for us to call on him in our need. "God delights in our asking. He is pleased at our asking. His heart is warmed by our asking." (*Prayer* – Richard Foster)

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray his example was mostly petition.

Matt. 6:9-13

⁹"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

- ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
¹² Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

Luke 11:9-13

⁹"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Isa. 30:15-16,18

¹⁵This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says:

"In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,
but you would have none of it.

¹⁶ You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.'
Therefore you will flee!
You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.'...

¹⁸ Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you;
he rises to show you compassion.
For the LORD is a God of justice.
Blessed are all who wait for him!

Isa. 64:4

⁴ Since ancient times no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

Why would God want us to ask him for things he already knows we need? Richard Foster in his book *Prayer*, addresses the question:

"The most straight forward answer to this question is simply that God likes to be asked. We like for our children to ask us for things that we already know they need because the very asking enhances and deepens the relationship. P.T. Forsyth notes 'Loves loves to be told what it knows already... It wants to be asked for what it longs to give.'"

If we know God we will ask for his gifts.

John4:9 ff

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

One might object to petition and requests on the basis that they represent immaturity in one's relationship with God. The more spiritual response would come through expressions of adoration of God rather than egocentric requests. As Foster comments, "Petition... is not a lower form of prayer. It is our staple diet. In a childlike expression of faith we bring our daily needs and desires to our heavenly father."

Our petitions and requests are testimony to our utter dependence upon God. Petitions and requests reflect an acknowledgement of God's gifts and therefore are an appropriate and meaningful part of the very nature of worship along with praise, thanksgiving, remembrance, sacrifice, confession and proclamation.

God Wants to be Glorified

Our petitions and requests are to be God-centered and thus bring glory to God. That which brings glory to God is by definition worship.

John 14:13

"...I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father"

John 15:7-8

⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

John Piper (*Desiring God*) writes:

"Suppose you are totally paralyzed and can do nothing for yourself but talk. And suppose a strong and reliable friend promised to live with you and do whatever you needed done. How could you glorify your friend if a stranger came to see you? Would you glorify his generosity and strength by trying to get out of bed and carry him?

No! You would say, "Friend, please come lift me up, and would you put a pillow behind me so I can look at my guest. And would you please put my glasses on for me?" And so your visitor would learn from your requests that you are helpless and that your friend is strong and kind. You glorify your friend by needing him and asking him for help and counting on him."

In John 15:5 Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." So

we really are paralyzed. Without Christ we are capable of no good. As Paul says in Romans 7:18, "There dwells in me, that is in my flesh, no good thing."

But according to John 15:5, God intends for us to do something good -- namely, bear fruit. So as our strong and reliable friend -- "I call you friends" (John 15:15) --he promises to do for us what we can't do for ourselves.

How then do we glorify him? Jesus gives the answer in John 15:7 -- "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you." We *pray*! We ask God to do for us through Christ what we can't do for ourselves -- bear fruit. Verse 8 gives the result: "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." So how is God glorified by prayer? Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that he will provide the help we need. Prayer humbles us as needy, and exalts God as wealthy.

We do not glorify God by providing his needs but by asking him to serve our needs and trusting him to answer.

Psa. 50:14-15

- ¹⁴ Sacrifice thank offerings to God,
fulfill your vows to the Most High,
¹⁵ and call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

Acts 17:24-27

²⁴"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

God aims to exalt himself by working for those who wait for him. Prayer is the essential activity of waiting for God: acknowledging our helplessness and his power, calling upon him for help, seeking his counsel. So it is evident why prayer is so often commanded by God, since His purpose in the world is to be exalted for his mercy prayer is the antidote for the disease of self-confidence that opposes God's goal of getting glory by working for those who wait for him.

"The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might on behalf of those whose

heart is whole toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). God is not looking for people to work for him, so much as he is looking for people who will let him work for them. The gospel is not a Help Wanted ad. Neither is the call to Christian service. On the contrary, the gospel commands us to give up and hang out a Help Wanted sign (this is the basic meaning of prayer). Then the gospel promises that God will work for us if we do. He will not surrender the glory of being the Giver.

But is there not anything we can give him that won't belittle him to the status of beneficiary? Yes -- our anxieties, its a command: "Cast all your anxieties on him" (1 Peter 5:7). God will gladly receive anything from us that shows our dependence and his all-sufficiency. (John Piper – *Desiring God*)

INTERCESSION / REQUESTS

1 Sam. 12:23

...far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.

1Peter 2:9

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

"As priests, appointed and anointed by God, we have the honor of going before the Most High on behalf of others. This is not optional; it is a sacred obligation – and precious privilege – of all who take up the yoke of Christ." (Richard Foster – *Prayer*)

Matt. 5:44

⁴⁴But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

Eph. 6:18

¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

James 5:16

¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

I John 5:16

¹⁶If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.

Their (Christians as priests) function is also that of mediating between the world and God, by not only devoting

themselves to their fellow men through spiritual sacrifices, but also by praying for them. Every Christian is a priest for the world, by having free access to God in faith and by being able to appear before God on behalf of others and intercede for them: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all men" (1 Tim. 2:1) (Hans Kung)

MELODIES FROM THE HEART OF A WORSHIPPER

This lesson concludes our look at seven melodies from the heart of a worshipper: Praise, Thanksgiving, Remembrance, Sacrifice, Confession, Proclamation and Petitions and requests.

These melodies are the heart of worship. Because worship is the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice they together form the essence of our lives as children of God. Every aspect of our life is to be worship. For that reason recognizing and understanding these melodies will serve to shape and guide us as we worship God in our daily lives.

Attitudes in the Heart of a Worshipper

Reverence

INTRODUCTION

For the next three lessons we will examine attitudes that should predominate as we worship and thusly our lives as we live out our worship to God. These attitudes ...reverence, joy and celebration ... emanate from the nature of God and our relationship with Him.

Proper attitude for worship is not a prerogative of the worshiper but is determined by the nature of God. A corollary is ... the attitudes we portray in worship are a reflection of our understanding of God. Our attitudes and worship (life) is continually in the process of fine-tuning as our understanding of God grows. C. Wilton Gaddy in *The Gift of Worship* writes:

"Every word and act in worship constitutes a witness about God as well as an offering to God. The manner in which God is worshiped is a message of how God is perceived, how God's holiness is to be revered and approached. Of concern in worship, then, is not only giving to God what is best, what God deserves, what is consistent with God's nature, but giving to God that which most accurately reveals the nature of God to others.

...Acceptable worship in God's sight is worship that truly reveals the nature of God in people's sight."

The premise, of this and the next two lessons, is that reverence, joy and celebration are attitudes consistent with the nature of God and our relationship with Him; therefore an essential part of our witness about God to the world.

REVERENCE

Reverence is defined as a feeling of profound awe and respect and includes the idea of fear that originates in God's awesomeness.

God is to be Revered

Exod 20:18-20

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

Isa 6

I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

Psa 96

- ¹ Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- ² Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
- ³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
- ⁴ For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
- ⁵ For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
- ⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Psa 145

- ¹ I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.
- ² Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.
- ³ Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.

Jer 10

¹Hear what the LORD says to you, O house of Israel. ²This is what the LORD says:

- ⁶ No one is like you, O LORD;
you are great,
and your name is mighty in power.
- ⁷ Who should not revere you,
O King of the nations?
This is your due.
Among all the wise men of the nations
and in all their kingdoms,

there is no one like you.
8 They are all senseless and foolish;
they are taught by worthless wooden idols.
10 But the LORD is the true God;
he is the living God, the eternal King.
When he is angry, the earth trembles;
the nations cannot endure his wrath.

Isa 40

"Here is your God!"

13 Who has understood the mind of the LORD,
or instructed him as his counselor?
14 Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,
and who taught him the right way?
18 To whom, then, will you compare God?
What image will you compare him to?
28 Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

Also see Job 39-40

One of the most beautiful and comprehensive theological summaries of the person of God is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith:

"There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure Spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions: immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute: working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin: the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and with all, most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself: and is alone in and unto Himself all sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is alone the fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth... In His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, nothing is to Him contingent or and independent of the creature, so as uncertain. He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature,

whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them."

The wise man concluded: "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

It is clear that God is deserving of reverence. The truth concerning God is overwhelming. How can we possibly approach God, much less worship Him?

We believe and have affirmed in this class that we are continually in the presence of God. God lives in us. He is always near. Therefore all that we do is worship to God.

How do we span the chasm between an awesome, wonderful, terrifying and unapproachable God and the intimate, casual and continually present God we presume?

Ref. Hebrews chapters 9-12

No one can come into the presence of God who is not holy. Un-holiness (sin) cannot exist in the presence of God.

9:1-10 – God in his covenant with the people of Israel made provision for their worship through regulations and the tabernacle.

⁷But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

The sacrifice of Christ has made his people holy.

9:14; 10:10

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Because his people are holy, they can come into the presence of God and worship.

10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

If we deliberately and continually bring sin into the presence of God, we cannot worship and become enemies of God.

10:26-27, 29-31

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

God has not changed. His relationship with his people has changed. We have come into the "Shekinah" of God... the glory or radiance of God dwelling in the midst of his people. It denotes the immediate presence of God as opposed to a God who is abstract or aloof.

10:16-17; 12:18-24

"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

Then he adds:

"Their sins and lawless acts
I will remember no more."

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Acceptable worship on Mount Zion... in the Shekinah of God... is characterized by reverence and awe.

12:28-29

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."

John Piper is helpful in providing dimension to the attitude of reverence and awe that springs from the reality of God.

Perhaps the first response of the heart at seeing the majestic holiness God is stunned silence. "Be still and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10). "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

In the silence rises a sense of awe and reverence and wonder at the sheer magnitude of God. "Let all the earth fear the LORD, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him" (Psalm 33:8).

And because we are all sinners there is in our reverence a holy dread of God's righteous power. "The LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13). "I will worship toward thy holy temple in the fear of thee" (Psalm 5:7).

But this dread is not a paralyzing fright full of resentment against God's absolute authority. It finds release in brokenness and contrition and grief for our ungodliness. "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:1-7).

"Thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isaiah 57:15).

Mingled with the feeling of genuine brokenness and contrition there also a longing for God. "As a heart longs for the flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:1-2). "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26). "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is" (Psalm 63:1).

As we contemplate the reality of God and the astounding possibility of not only drawing near to worship Him but to be in His presence continually, the implications are both wonderful and terrifying. There is nothing in all creation that takes precedence over a personal and eternal relationship with God our Creator. It is both a wonder and wonderful. There we find the meaning of our existence.

However, understanding the perfection and holiness of God and faced with my imperfection and un-holiness, the continual presence of God is a terrifying prospect. Not only is it unthinkable to approach God, it is disastrous. We will surely be destroyed. How can I stand before God Almighty?

Only through Christ.

"...we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all."

"...we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus..."

The reason that I can stand boldly in the presence of God is Jesus Christ. There is no other way that I can come to God.

The only way that I can live each day, every moment of my life in the presence of God, offering my body as a living sacrifice with all my sin and imperfection is because of Jesus. Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith". Without Jesus there is "only a fearful expectation of judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

Jesus answers the question posed earlier, How do we span the chasm between an awesome, wonderful, terrifying and unapproachable God and the intimate, casual and continually present God we presume? Jesus spans the chasm and we can find fellowship with God, a fellowship that begins now and extends eternally.

Our relationship with God through Jesus Christ does not result in the "dumbing down" of God so that we have a really neat pal. Through Jesus we are elevated and perfected. We are being given the fullness of Deity in Christ. (Col. 2:9-10) God has not changed and is deserving of reverence and awe.

"...since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'"

Attitudes in the Heart of a Worshipper

Joy

JOY REIGNS IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD.

Psa 16:11

¹¹ You have made known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psa 43:4

Then will I go to the altar of God,
to God, my joy and my delight.

I Chron 16:10, 27

¹⁰ Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and joy in his dwelling place.

Psa. 36:8

⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.

Deut. 12:4-7

⁴You must not worship the LORD your God in their way. ⁵But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; ⁶there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.

Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.
(Léon Henri Marie Bloy (1846-1917))

FOR CHRISTIANS, JOY IS NOT AN OPTION.

Matt 13:44

⁴⁴"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

1 Pet 1:8-9

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Gal 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Rom 14:17-18

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Rom 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

John 15:10-12

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Matt. 5:3-12

- 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
- 5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
- 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.
- 7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
- 8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
- 9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
- 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you
and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
- 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in
heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets
who were before you.ⁱ

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

At this point there is temptation to respond to the imperative of joy in our Christian life by focusing on the external expressions of joy. But the absence of joy in our lives cannot be solved by, as the popular song suggested, "Be happy,

Don't worry". John Piper points out ... " if we focus our attention on our own subjective experience of joy, we will most certainly be frustrated and God will not be honored." To act joyously in the absence of a heart filled with joy is to be a hypocrite. It is essential we understand the nature of joy.

A common mistake is to confuse joy with happiness. In our society the pursuit of happiness is the considered a high and noble goal. The search for happiness is the fuel that drives our capitalist engine. It is our fundamental belief that we have an inalienable right to pursue happiness.

Happiness and joy are not synonymous. William Barclay commented on happiness.

"The English word happiness gives its own case away. It contains the root hap which means chance. Human happiness is something which is dependent on the chances and the changes of life, something which life may give and which life may also destroy. ...The world can win its joys, and the world can equally well lose its joys. A change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition, even a change in the weather, can take away the the joy the world can give."

Fredrick Buechner writes: "Happiness is man-made--a happy home, a happy marriage, a happy relationship with our friends and within our jobs. We work for these things, and if we are careful and wise and lucky, we can usually achieve them. Happiness is one of the highest achievements of which we are capable, and when it is ours, we take credit for it, and properly so."

BEYOND HAPPINESS

We should not be so foolish to settle for happiness when there is the possibility of joy. "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." (C. S. Lewis)

There is an opposite and similarly destructive mind-set that can rob us of the joy that is found in God. It finds its origin in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Ayn Rand described Kant's belief: "An action is moral only if one has no desire to perform it, but performs it out of a sense of duty and derives no benefit from it of any sort, neither material nor spiritual. A benefit destroys the moral value of an action. (Thus if one has no desire to be evil, one cannot be good; if one has, one can.)" To put it simply, to desire our own good and hope to enjoy it is a bad thing.

This is not what God desires for us. He wants us to find joy in Him. As Piper puts it, "God commands we find joy in loving God. We are commanded by the Word of God, 'Delight

yourself in the LORD.' This means: Pursue joy in God." The joy of which we speak is not of our selves it is of God. It is infinite happiness, beyond anything we can attain or hope for. "The deepest most enduring happiness is found in God. Not from god, in God." (Piper)

Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth. For that reason we must offer that which glorifies him not ourselves. Happiness as we defined above is to our glory. Joy comes from God and therefore as we reflect joy in our lives (worship) we are gladly reflecting his worth.

WHAT IS JOY

Joy is a mystery. Because it has its origin in God, joy is divine ...of infinite quality. As Peter wrote, it is ... "inexpressible and glorious".

R. H. Strachan said. "The joy of Jesus is the joy that arises from the sense of a finished work. It is creative joy, like the joy of the artist. It produces a sense of unexhausted power for fresh creation."

William H. Willimon in his book *With Glad and Generous Hearts* wrote: "Joy is invariably reflexive, responsive. We can't decide to be joyful. Joy is not something we do. It is rather the fitting response to the action of someone else upon us. When a rocket explodes, illuminating a July sky, showering brilliant sparks, an "Ah!" of wonder arises from the crowd. The crowd is beyond the realm of reason, decision, and choice. Their "Ah!" is response to an event, a happening, a presence. Joy is like that. It is not a warm, rosy feeling we work up--to do so would be artificial, forced. Joy, holy joy, is reflexive."

C.S. Lewis said, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." In *You Gotta Keep Dancing*, Tim Hansel explained: "Joy is something which defies circumstances and occurs in spite of difficult situations. Whereas happiness is a feeling, joy is an attitude. A posture. A position. A place. As Paul Sailhamer says, 'Joy is that deep settled confidence that God is in control of every area of my life.' It is not a feeling; it is a choice. It is not based upon circumstances; it is based upon attitude. It is free, but it is not cheap. It is the byproduct of a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a promise, not a deal. It is available to us when we make ourselves available to him. It is something that we can receive by invitation and by choice. It requires commitment, courage, and endurance."

Fredrick Beuchner following his comments on happiness says: "...but we never take credit for our moments of joy because we know that they are not man-made and that we are never really responsible for them. They come when they come. They are always sudden and quick and unrepeatable. The unspeakable joy sometimes of just being

alive. The miracle sometimes of being just who we are with the blue sky and the green grass, the faces of our friends and the waves of the ocean, being just what they are. The joy of release, of being suddenly well when before we were sick, of being forgiven when before we were ashamed and afraid, of finding ourselves loved when we were lost and alone. The joy of love, which is the joy of the flesh as well as the spirit.

(Two things) One is that joy is always all-encompassing; there is nothing of us left over to hate with or to be afraid with, to feel guilty with or to be selfish about. Joy is where the whole being is pointed in one direction, and it is something that by its nature a man never hoards but always wants to share.

The second thing is that joy is a mystery because it can happen anywhere, anytime, even under the most unpromising circumstances, even in the midst of suffering, with tears in its eyes. Even nailed to a tree.

Because of joy's divine and mysterious nature, attempts to explain joy, while perhaps truthful and helpful, fail to provide complete understanding. Joy can only be received and accepted in faith.

HOW DO WE FIND JOY?

How do we find this wonderful and inexpressible joy that exceeds all our dreams and hopes for happiness? As should be expected from what we have learned thus far in our lesson, joy can only be found in God. The joy we seek is only found in God and only through Jesus can we come to God and dwell in his presence and receive the joy God desires for us.

Jesus told his disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:9-11) Joy is found in Christ alone. When we obey his commands his love remains in us and his joy is in us.

Richard Foster writes: "In the spiritual life only one thing will produce genuine joy, and that is obedience. ...What is the Christian's secret to a happy life? Joy comes through obedience to Christ, and joy results from obedience to Christ. Without obedience joy is hollow and artificial."

Matt 25:21-22

²¹"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

WHAT CAN ROB US OF JOY?

Jesus answered the question in John 16 when he reassured his disciples as they faced grief-filled days ahead as Jesus was to die. "...Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

In Jesus, nothing can take away our joy.

Perhaps we find our lives absent of the joy that God desires for us. One of the great parables of Søren Kierkegaard and a quote from Henri Nouwen can hopefully enlighten us in our search for joy.

When the prosperous man on a dark but starlit night drives comfortably in his car and has the lanterns lighted, aye, then he is safe, he fears no difficulty, he carries his light with him, and it is not dark close around him. But precisely because he has the lanterns lighted, and has a strong light close to him, precisely for this reason, he cannot see the stars. For his lights obscure the stars, which the poor peasant, driving without lights, can see gloriously in the dark but starry night. So those deceived ones live in the temporal existence: either, occupied with the necessities of life, they are too busy to avail themselves of the view, or in their prosperity and good days they have, as it were, lanterns lighted, and close about them everything is so satisfactory, so pleasant, so comfortable -- but the view is lacking, the prospect, the view of the stars.

I have a friend who radiates joy, not because his life is easy, but because he habitually recognizes God's presence in the midst of all human suffering, his own as well as others'. ... My friend's joy is contagious. The more I am with him, the more I catch glimpses of the sun shining through the clouds. Yes, I know there is a sun, even though the skies are covered with clouds. While my friend always spoke about the sun, I kept speaking about the clouds, until one day I realized that it was the sun that allowed me to see the clouds.

Those who keep speaking about the sun while walking under a cloudy sky are messengers of hope, the true saints of our day.

Henri J. Nouwen in Here and Now: Living in the Spirit.

Psalms 51

- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Romans 15

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ⁱ William Barclay – The Gospel of Matthew

The word blessed which is used in each of the beatitudes is a very special word. It is the Greek word makarios. Makarios is the word which specially describes the gods. In Christianity there is a divine and godlike joy. The meaning of makarios can best be seen from one particular usage of it. The Greeks always called Cyprus *hi makaria* (the feminine form of the adjective), which means The Happy Isle, and they did so because they believed that Cyprus was so lovely, so rich, and so fertile an island that a man would never need to go beyond its coastline to find the perfectly happy life. It had such a climate, such flowers and fruits and trees, such minerals, such natural resources that it contained within itself all the materials for perfect happiness. Makarios then describes that joy which has its secret within itself, that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, that joy which is completely independent of all the chances and the changes of life.

Attitudes in the Heart of a Worshipper

- Celebration

CELEBRATION

Definitions:

Let us be sure what we are talking about when we say celebration is an attitude of worship. Celebration can be understood in two ways. First, there is celebration in the sense of performing a rite or giving honor to an event i.e. we celebrate the Lord's Supper. The KJV usually translates this as "keep".

Secondly, celebration may be understood in the sense of merriment... a joyful and exuberant spirit of happiness characterized by festivity, fun and thanksgiving. In Luke 15 when the prodigal son returned, the father said, "Let's have a feast and celebrate". The KJV translates, "...let us eat and be merry." When we say celebration is an attitude of worship, it is with this second understanding in mind.

Celebration is:

...centered in God not ourselves.

Psams 100

¹Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

²Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

³Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

⁵For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

...joy overflowing from our fellowship in God.

Psalms 63:3-5

³Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.

⁴I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

⁵My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

...the transformation of joy into life.

The attitude of joy that characterizes our nature as God's people cannot be restrained. When joy breaks out, there is celebration. When joy overflows it finds expression... verbal and physical demonstrations.

Psalms 30:11

¹¹You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
¹²that my heart may sing to you and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

...festive,

Sometimes almost playful, and conspicuous in its gladness as it takes delight in what God is about. Ultimately, therefore, true worship is not solemn, since its proper gravity, its very seriousness, its correct decorum is a graced gladness, its sounds are a holy glee; and its silences are stilled rejoicing "with unutterable and exalted joy" (1 Peter 1:8). (Burkhardt)

...spontaneous.

Celebration comes not in calculated rituals, but in spontaneous outbreaks. To restrain celebration is to diminish our worship response. Worship without celebration would be like attending the 1980 Olympic hockey game between Russia and the U.S. and sitting silent with our hands folded as the U.S. won a seemingly impossible victory. (If you cannot identify with 1980 Olympics, pretend you are watching UofK or UofL win an NCAA championship.)

...is consistent not constant.

The people of God are not constantly in a state of celebration but consistently celebrate in God. There are occasions where joy overflows and the response is celebration. We celebrate in the mighty acts of God ...victory ...salvation ...mercy ...redemption ...rescue ...gifts ...justice ...hope.

There may be an impression that all of worship culminates in celebration and we cannot come to God unless we celebrate. Perhaps there is some expectation that genuine worship can be identified by verbal and physical manifestations. John Piper describes three stages of movement toward the ideal worship experience. The stages can help us to see how we come to celebration and why our worship is not always characterized by celebration.

The lowest stage of worship where all genuine worship starts, and where it often returns for a dark season is the barrenness of soul that scarcely feels any longing, and yet is still granted the grace of repentant sorrow for having so little love. "When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was stupid and ignorant, I was like a beast toward thee" (Psalm 73:22).

In a middle stage that we often taste, we do not feel fullness, but rather longing and desire. Having tasted the feast before, we recall the goodness of the Lord but it seems far off. We preach to our souls not to be downcast, because

we are sure we shall again praise the Lord (Psalm 42:5). Yet for now our hearts are not very fervent.

Even though this falls short of the ideal of vigorous, heartfelt adoration and hope, yet it is a great honor to God. We honor the water from a mountain spring not only by the satisfied "ahhh" after drinking our fill, but also by the unquenched longing to be satisfied while still climbing to it.

There is the final stage in which we feel an unencumbered joy in the manifold perfections of God -- the joy of gratitude, wonder, hope, admiration. "My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips" (Psalm 63:5). In this stage we are satisfied with the excellency of God, and we overflow with the joy of his fellowship.

It is in the final stage of worship that celebration is expressed. Piper's stages should not be thought of as sequential and progressive but rather descriptive of worship that coincides with the ups and downs of our lives and our relationship with God in the process of our Christian journey. Consequently, our worship will not always be the same nor will we always celebrate in our worship. It is possible to experience all three stages of worship in a single worship setting.

Although worship can occur without celebration, the ideal worship experience will always include celebration.

What Celebration Means

Don McLaughlin suggests that if we are going to work and worship we must be a people that demonstrate the ministry of Jesus and celebration is one way to demonstrate the ministry of Jesus.

Celebration demonstrates understanding.

Luke 19:28-44

³⁶As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" □

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

⁴⁰"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

⁴¹As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴²and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this

day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

The Pharisees were concerned that the crowds were expressing their belief in loud celebration. They did not understand the truth about Jesus. Those that celebrated recognized that Jesus was the Messiah and their celebration demonstrated it.

Celebration demonstrates appreciation

Matt 21:15-16

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

¹⁶"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,

"From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise'?"

Celebration demonstrates relationship

Luke 15:11:32

¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is

alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

²⁷'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹"'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

So What If There Isn't Celebration in My Worship?

My first defense to an absence of celebration in my worship experience is that I'm just not the kind of person that is very demonstrative. I'm really uncomfortable with outward celebrations. (I am sure there are other people for whom this is true; but, isn't it strange that so many of us happen to find ourselves in this church?) However, there are some other possibilities we should consider.

Perhaps we are like the older brother of the lost son in Luke 15. Our relationship with God is a joyless burden lived out in heartless duty. Absorbed in our self-righteousness, we are more concerned about the punishment of our sinful brother than joyously celebrating the loving generosity of our Father.

Richard Foster suggests "The spirit of celebration will not be in us until we have learned to be 'careful for nothing.' (Phil 4:6) And we will never have a carefree indifference to things until we trust God. This is why the Jubilee was such a crucial celebration in the Old Testament. No one would dare celebrate the Jubilee unless they had a deep trust in God's ability to provide for their needs."

An absence of celebration could very well reflect our lack of trust in God.

There is the possibility that we are quenching the power of the Lord that transforms into His likeness. (2 Cor. 3:18) Our concern for the praise of others overshadows our belief. (John 12:42-43)

Considering Piper's stages of worship and the concept of celebration raises a question as to the frequency of ideal worship experiences. I would suggest that ideal worship experiences occur much less often than we might think. In fact, assuming celebration is an accurate barometer of ideal worship experience, the occasions are probably rare.

A void of celebration cannot be resolved by caveat. We will celebrate when there is authentic joy in our hearts. God will transform us if we allow him to be lord of our lives. Richard Foster writes: "Often we try to pump up people with joy when in reality nothing has happened in their lives. God has not broken into the routine experiences of their daily existence. Celebration comes when the common ventures of life are redeemed."

It is important to avoid the kind of celebrations that really celebrate nothing. Worse yet is to pretend to celebrate when the spirit of celebration is not in us. Our children watch us bless the food and promptly proceed to gripe about it--blessings that are not blessings. One of the things that nearly destroys our children is being forced to be grateful when they are not grateful. If we pretend an air of celebration, our inner spirit is put in contradiction."

God is pleased with sincere and heart-centered celebration that arises out of our joy in Him. He invites us to come and celebrate with him. It is our Father who throws the party. When you come near the house of our Father you will hear the music and dancing.

Psalms 138

- 1 I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart;
before the "gods" I will sing your praise.
- 2 I will bow down toward your holy temple
and will praise your name
for your love and your faithfulness,
for you have exalted above all things
your name and your word.
- 3 When I called, you answered me;
you made me bold and stouthearted.

Psalms 115

- 17 It is not the dead who praise the LORD,
those who go down to silence;
- 18 it is we who extol the LORD,
both now and forevermore.
Praise the LORD.

ASSEMBLY AS WORSHIP

On several occasions teaching or preaching on the subject of worship, I have asserted that worship as the church on the Lord's Day is continually the most important event of our Christian lives. This study has not changed my mind on that point.

Perhaps an initial response to this assertion would be ...“ Of course, everyone knows how important it is to go to church”. We think of coming to church so that we can worship; that is, assembling as a means to the end of worship. In fact, our most frequent barometer of “faithfulness” is church attendance. We measure progress and success as a church by attendance numbers.

However, one might question such a high regard for assembling on the basis of the reality that all of our life is worship and that God is always with us and we are continually in his presence. Can we not worship God just as well on our own? “After all, worship services are ...boring ...irrelevant ... (you fill in the blank)”. “I get more out of it at home than when I'm in church.”

In either case, it is essential to understand what makes the Lord's Day assembly so important. With regard to the former case, there is the danger that assembly (church) becomes a work, an opportunity for self-righteousness, which disregards the heart of the matter. In the latter case, an inappropriate understanding of assembly can lead to assemblies that are nothing more than occasions of convenience and self-indulgence.

The first premise of this lesson is that assembling ...“coming to church”... is, in and of itself, worship. While it is certainly true that when we are assembled we worship, it is vitally important we understand assembling as distinctly worship. The second premise of our lesson is that worship as assembly is continually the most important worship in the Christian experience.

ASSEMBLY AS WORSHIP

The central point of understanding assembly as worship lies in the concept of the people of God.

Kung writes: “Fundamentally the whole faith of Judaism can be summed up in a single phrase: Yahweh is the God of Israel and Israel is the people of God. Israel is the people of Yahweh, his people, his possession, his own. It does not own itself, it is the property of Yahweh, a people set apart and hence holy, belonging to the Lord.”

Ex. 6:6-7

⁶"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ⁷I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God,...

Ex. 19:5

⁵Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Lev. 26:9, 11-12

⁹"I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you.

¹¹I will put my dwelling place[□] among you, and I will not abhor you. ¹²I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.

Kung comments further: This community (NT church) realized more and more clearly that through faith in Jesus as the Messiah it was the true Israel, the true people of God. ... It was not the name "disciples" nor the name "Christians" which are the characteristic names for the believers in Christ, but the ancient titles of Israel. First and foremost beside "ekklesia", that of the "people of God". The idea of the people of God is the oldest and most fundamental concept underlying the self-interpretation of the ekklesia. Images such as those of the body of Christ, the temple and so on, are secondary by comparison.

We find in the New Testament that the Old Testament descriptions of the people of God are now applied to the church. We are the people of God. On the day of Pentecost a new community was formed which took over the great title of the OT – kahal Yahweh – the community of God (a meeting of the people called together) The corresponding Greek word which became established as the new name for this community was "ekklesia of God" today simply called the church.

2 Cor. 6:16

¹⁶What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."[□]

¹⁷ "Therefore come out from them

and be separate,
says the Lord.
Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you."
18 "I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."

Heb. 8:10-12

10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
after that time, declares the Lord.
I will put my laws in their minds
and write them on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
11 No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
12 For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.

Acts 15:14

¹⁴Simon has described to us how God at first showed his
concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.

Rom. 9:24-26

²³What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to
the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for
glory—²⁴even us, whom he also called, not only from the
Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵As he says in Hosea:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;
and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved
one,"

²⁶and,

"It will happen that in the very place where it was
said to them,

'You are not my people,'
they will be called 'sons of the living God.' "

Titus 2:14

...Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from
all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his
very own, eager to do what is good.

Rev. 18:4

⁴Then I heard another voice from heaven say:
"Come out of her, my people,

I Peter 2:9

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

For Israel, because they were the people of God, their primary act of worship was to assemble as God's people. God calls his people together. His covenant is with his people. The occasion of the of God's initiating his covenant with the people of Israel at Sinai is remember as the "day of assembly". (Deut. 9:10)

The importance of being together as God's people may be best understood in the punishment for disobedience. ...if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking him to anger, ²⁶I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. ²⁷The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. (Deut. 4:25-27)

The "horror" that results from disobedience was dispersion. "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth." (Deut. 28:25).

We then, like the people of Israel, are the people of God. There can be no more appropriate response to the reality of being God's people than to come together as His people. It is nonsensical to be a people and not assemble.

As Burkhardt puts it:

Religion is not what one does with solitariness; it begins in the move to overcome solitariness. They (New Testament Christians) assembled for worship, and in that assembling these Christians expressed the reality of their common commitment. Their very assembling was itself their primordial act of worship.

Thus, from the words used to describe their assemblies, it appears that the earliest Christians understood themselves as coming together, gathered and bought, into a shared selfhood, graced and lived together in the presence and praise of God. This surely was what their assemblies were all about. Indeed, for them their very being together was so

symbolic of their vision of reality made one through Christ that even the thought of isolated virtue was –diabolical.

THE MODERN MIND

Notwithstanding our comprehension that we are the people of God, there is an additional factor that impedes our understanding of and participation in assembly as worship. That factor is the elevation of individualism in western thinking.

Burkhardt writes:

Unfortunately, assembling for worship appears to make little sense to many in our society. The statistics are patent. For countless humans, congregating to worship has no obvious or compelling rationale

Individualism is assumed and esteemed today in ways and in measures which would have seemed idolatrous to the ancient Hebrews, idiotic (literally!) to the ancient Greeks, and traitorous to the ancient Romans. In our vaunted discovery of the individual, freedom has been equated with independence, covenant has been marked down as social contract, and social organization has been reduced to more or less voluntary associations whose membership results simply from acts of joining.

The modern stress is upon religious living as personal piety and devotion to God, independent of communal disciplines and separate from the ventures and vexations of life in society. Under the aegis of individualism, the trends from the public to the private, from the corporate to the personal, from the social to the solitary, are conspicuous today

Many in our time have turned inward to the isolated solaces of meditation, transcendental or otherwise, making solitude the sanctuary for the divine in their lives. Wherever individualism is assumed to give a sufficient reading of human being, gatherings for worship are dispensable options and religion becomes a private affair.

Compartmentalization, as Durkheim noted, is a consequence of the division of labor in modern society. As religion and society have been sundered by individualism and specialization, piety has been marginalized, relegated to a compartment in life

Religion, under the impact of individualism and compartmentalization, has become privatized. Its pieties are familial at best, cozily congenial, and scarcely venturing beyond the friendly intimacies of the familiar. ...In contemporary society, for countless millions, churching and unchurching alike, religion has become an occasionally attractive hobby, lingering on the fringes of reality.

Religious consumerism is the consequence, and assembling for Worship loses any rationale other than pious selfishness. A reading of reality that individualizes humanity and compartmentalizes religion gives worship the task of cultivating the self. Such religion no longer expresses or constitutes true social bonds, but serves finally to affirm, enhance, and enshrine attachment to ourselves as private persons. Within such a view of reality, the socially inclined become joiners, associating themselves with others for mutual benefit. Hence many people appear to choose religious associations the way they select other leisure activities, in terms of interests and satisfactions.

Consequently, the so called "successful" congregations tend to perforce to become rather loosely textured associations of assorted individuals and families seeking similar diversions, duties, and delights. In order to survive, many congregations seem to have acquiesced in, or even catered to, the pervasive consumer orientation of modern industrial societies, while their adherents seek a "faith that satisfies", "join the church of their choice and, evaluate worship by whether they "get anything out of it".

Consumerism has become the order of the worship day. Spawned by individualism and nourished in compartmentalization, the cosmology of consumerism renders senseless any assemblies for worship whose logic is other than ganging up to get a proper purchase on God's favor. Such religion becomes a club, using the force of numbers to coerce God. Ultimately, of course, such victories are of short duration, since consumerism finally founders on the truth that worship and selfishness are incompatible.

In the biblical reading of reality, individualism is demonic. It is literally diabolic, breaking covenants, rupturing relations, and sundering humanity from itself. From the garden, to the city, from the initial "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18) to the new Jerusalem which unites the nations (Revelation 21); the Bible is the story of peoples. The basic metaphors are not private but public, not personal but political. According to Genesis, not an individual but humanity, male and female, images God. God creates, chooses, covenants with, suffers with, struggles with, and restores a people. The term Israel is itself relational. Israel strives with God.

Worship and selfishness are incompatible.

WHY ASSEMBLY AS WORSHIP IS SO IMPORTANT

Deut. 4:10; 9:10 Nehemiah 8-12

- It is in assembly that the reality of our relationship with God as his people is most accurately portrayed.

- It is in assembly that God's people are encouraged and validated.
- God is encountered in the assembly of his people, he dwells in the midst of his people.
- Assembly delivers us from the loneliness of exile.
- God's assembled people are living testimony to God's saving power and purposes.
- We celebrate the very coherence of the cosmos by assembling. "in him all things hold together."
- By assembling we proclaim God's purpose to unite in him his own people.

Lynn Anderson, in answer to the question, "What is the message you give struggling church"?, says, "Worship God". It is his contention that the fundamental business of the church is worship. It is more important than anything else. Worship drives the function of everything else.

WORSHIP AND THE CHURCH

OUR STATED PURPOSE AS WE BEGAN THIS STUDY WAS ... TO, FIRST, EXPLORE THE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP (PRAISE, THANKSGIVING, REMEMBRANCE, SACRIFICE, CONFESSION, TEACHING AND REQUESTS) THAT SPRING FROM THE HEART OF THE YIELDED WORSHIPPER; AND, SECOND, CONSIDER HOW THEY FIND EXPRESSION IN OUR CORPORATE WORSHIP. THE GOAL OF OUR STUDY WAS ... TO DEEPEN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WORSHIP AND ENHANCE OUR PERSONAL AND CORPORATE WORSHIP EXPERIENCE.

AS THE STUDY PROGRESSED IT BECAME INCREASINGLY APPARENT TO ME THAT THE SECOND PURPOSE, CONSIDERING HOW THE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP FIND EXPRESSION IN OUR CORPORATE WORSHIP, WAS INDEED SECONDARY. THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE HEART OF WORSHIP IS MUCH MORE VITAL TO OUR WORSHIP EXPERIENCE THAN UNDERSTANDING THE PROPER RITUAL. THIS IS NOT TO DIMINISH RITUAL BUT TO PUT IT IN ITS APPROPRIATE CONTEXT. ACCORDINGLY OUR STUDY FELL SHORT IN ACHIEVING OUR SECOND PURPOSE. IT IS MY PRAYER THAT EACH OF YOU HAVE BEEN CHALLENGED BY THE CHARACTER AND NATURE OF WORSHIP AND WILL BE COMPELLED TO UNDERSTAND THEIR IMPLICATIONS TO OUR CORPORATE WORSHIP.

I RECENTLY "DISCOVERED" A QUOTATION THAT I BELIEVE BEST SUMMARIZES WHAT THIS STUDY HAS TAUGHT ME. C. S. LEWIS SAID, "WORSHIP IS LIKE DANCING. YOU'RE NOT DOING IT UNTIL YOU QUIT COUNTING THE STEPS." (I SUPPOSE THE METAPHOR OF DANCING WILL NOT RESONATE AS WELL WITH US AS SOME OTHER PEOPLE BUT HOPEFULLY WE GET THE POINT.)

WORSHIP AND THE CHURCH

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE PREVIOUS LESSON, YOU WERE CHALLENGED TO CONSIDER LYNN ANDERSON'S CONTENTION THAT THE FUNDAMENTAL BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH IS WORSHIP. WORSHIP IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING ELSE. IT IS WORSHIP THAT DRIVES ALL THE OTHER FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH. WHEN WE ARE DRIVEN BY WORSHIP WE ARE GOD DRIVEN.

WORSHIP

WORSHIP IS WHERE WE DELIBERATELY CHOOSE TO ENCOUNTER GOD. NOT ALL WORSHIP HAPPENS IN ASSEMBLY BUT SOMETHING SPECIAL HAPPENS WHEN WE ENCOUNTER GOD IN ASSEMBLY. IN WORSHIP WE ARE SENSITIZED TO THE NATURE, POWER AND PRESENCE OF GOD. IN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD WE ARE BROUGHT TO REALITY.

SOME CONTEND WE COME TO WORSHIP SO WE CAN GET FIRED UP TO GO BACK OUT AND CONTEND WITH THE REAL WORLD. THIS IS BACKWARDS. WHEN WE ENCOUNTER GOD WE ENCOUNTER THE ULTIMATE REALITY. IN THE ABSENCE OF ENCOUNTER WITH GOD WE LIVE IN ILLUSION OF REALITY. THE FURTHER WE ARE FROM GOD THE FURTHER WE ARE FROM REALITY.

PSALM 73

- ¹⁶ WHEN I TRIED TO UNDERSTAND ALL THIS,
IT WAS OPPRESSIVE TO ME
- ¹⁷ TILL I ENTERED THE SANCTUARY OF GOD;
THEN I UNDERSTOOD THEIR FINAL DESTINY.

CHANGED HEARTS

WHEN WE ENCOUNTER GOD SOMETHING HAPPENS TO OUR HEARTS. ENCOUNTER WITH GOD CHANGES HEARTS. ISAIAH'S EXPERIENCE IN CHAPTER 6 ILLUSTRATES THIS PROCESS. THE RESPONSE OF ISAIAH TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD WAS A CHANGED HEART., "WOE TO ME!" I CRIED. "I AM RUINED! FOR I AM A MAN OF UNCLEAN LIPS, AND I LIVE AMONG A PEOPLE OF UNCLEAN LIPS, AND MY EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING, THE LORD ALMIGHTY."

JOHN PIPER SAYS, "CONSISTENT EXPOSURE TO THE GLORY OF GOD BEGINS TO WEAN US FROM THE BREAST OF THE WORLD."

CHANGED CHARACTER

WHEN WE ARE ENCOUNTERING GOD IN WORSHIP AND OUR HEARTS ARE BEING CHANGED HE BEGINS TO CHANGE OUR CHARACTER. WE CANNOT CONTINUALLY LOOK IN TO THE FACE OF GOD AND CONTINUE TO HOLD ON TO MY SINFUL SELF. PAUL SAYS IN 2 COR. 3 ". . .WE, WHO WITH UNVEILED FACES ALL REFLECT THE LORD'S GLORY, ARE BEING TRANSFORMED INTO HIS LIKENESS WITH EVER-INCREASING GLORY, WHICH COMES FROM THE LORD, WHO IS THE SPIRIT." IT IS GOD WHO CHANGES US. WE WILL NEVER BE CHRISTIANS BY BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION.

GODLINESS

WHEN OUR CHARACTER IS CHANGED WE BECOME MORE LIKE GOD. WE BECOME PEOPLE OF COMPASSION, MERCY, AND JUSTICE. WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO GOD. THE STORIES TOLD BY JESUS IN LUKE 15 TEACH US ABOUT GODLINESS. JESUS IS SAYING THAT GOD CARES ABOUT PEOPLE. IN THE OT WORSHIP WAS ABOUT GOD AND HIS CONCERN FOR COMPASSION, MERCY AND JUSTICE.

ISAIAH 1:15-17

- ¹⁵ WHEN YOU SPREAD OUT YOUR HANDS IN PRAYER,
I WILL HIDE MY EYES FROM YOU;
EVEN IF YOU OFFER MANY PRAYERS,
I WILL NOT LISTEN.
YOUR HANDS ARE FULL OF BLOOD;
¹⁶ WASH AND MAKE YOURSELVES CLEAN.
TAKE YOUR EVIL DEEDS
OUT OF MY SIGHT!
STOP DOING WRONG,
¹⁷ LEARN TO DO RIGHT!
SEEK JUSTICE,
ENCOURAGE THE OPPRESSED.
DEFEND THE CAUSE OF THE FATHERLESS,
PLEAD THE CASE OF THE WIDOW.

AMOS 5:21-24

- ²¹ "I HATE, I DESPISE YOUR RELIGIOUS FEASTS;
I CANNOT STAND YOUR ASSEMBLIES.
²² EVEN THOUGH YOU BRING ME BURNT OFFERINGS AND GRAIN OFFERINGS,
I WILL NOT ACCEPT THEM.
THOUGH YOU BRING CHOICE FELLOWSHIP OFFERINGS,
I WILL HAVE NO REGARD FOR THEM.
²³ AWAY WITH THE NOISE OF YOUR SONGS!
I WILL NOT LISTEN TO THE MUSIC OF YOUR HARPS.
²⁴ BUT LET JUSTICE ROLL ON LIKE A RIVER,
RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE A NEVER-FAILING STREAM!

GOD IS SAYING DON'T TELL ME YOU WORSHIPPED BECAUSE YOU RAISED YOUR HANDS, YOU CLAPPED YOUR HANDS AND YOU EVEN CRIED DURING ONE OF THE PSALMS AND THEN YOU WENT BACK OUT INTO THE STREET AND MISTREATED THE ONES FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED. DON'T TELL ME YOU WORSHIPPED WHEN YOU ARE NOT A SERVANT AND YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT THE POOR. DON'T TELL ME YOU WORSHIPPED WHEN YOU CARE MORE ABOUT THE FLAVOR OF THE WORSHIP THAN THE HEART OF GOD. THE NEXT TIME YOU ARE GETTING BORED WITH YOUR WORSHIP YOU MIGHT ASK IF PERHAPS GOD IS NOT BORED WITH YOUR WORSHIP.

EVANGELISM

WHEN WE LOVE THE PEOPLE THAT NO ONE ELSE LOVES PEOPLE WILL LISTEN AND OUR MESSAGE WILL HAVE CREDIBILITY. PEOPLE WILL BE CALLED FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT. MORE PEOPLE WILL COME AND CONFESS JESUS AND BE BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM. THEN MORE WORSHIPPERS ARE BORN AND WILL GIVE GLORY TO GOD.

ALL OF THIS BEGINS WITH WORSHIP, ENCOUNTER WITH GOD. IT IS THE WORK OF GOD. THE FUNDAMENTAL BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH IS WORSHIP. FROM OUR WORSHIP THE WORK OF THE CHURCH WILL BE DRIVEN.

WE BEGAN THIS STUDY WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP: FIRST, ONE'S HEART MUST BE RIGHT WITH GOD, AND ONLY THEN CAN OUR EXTERNAL ACTS OF WORSHIP BE ACCEPTABLE. THIS IS THE THREAD THAT RUNS THROUGH ALL OF THE ELEMENTS AND ATTITUDES OF WORSHIP THAT WE HAVE STUDIED. THE "PROBLEM" OF WORSHIP IN THE CHURCH TODAY IS NOT FORM, STYLE, CONTENT OR METHODS. PROBLEMS WITH WORSHIP ARE ULTIMATELY CONNECTED TO THE HEART OF THE WORSHIPPER. THE ONLY SOLUTION TO WORSHIP "PROBLEMS" IS A HEART YIELDED TO GOD.

PSALMS 51

- ¹⁰ CREATE IN ME A PURE HEART, O GOD,
AND RENEW A STEADFAST SPIRIT WITHIN ME.
- ¹¹ DO NOT CAST ME FROM YOUR PRESENCE
OR TAKE YOUR HOLY SPIRIT FROM ME.
- ¹² RESTORE TO ME THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION
AND GRANT ME A WILLING SPIRIT, TO SUSTAIN ME.
- ¹³ THEN I WILL TEACH TRANSGRESSORS YOUR WAYS,
AND SINNERS WILL TURN BACK TO YOU.
- ¹⁴ SAVE ME FROM BLOODGUILT, O GOD,
THE GOD WHO SAVES ME,
AND MY TONGUE WILL SING OF YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.
- ¹⁵ O LORD, OPEN MY LIPS,
AND MY MOUTH WILL DECLARE YOUR PRAISE.
- ¹⁶ YOU DO NOT DELIGHT IN SACRIFICE, OR I WOULD BRING IT;
YOU DO NOT TAKE PLEASURE IN BURNT OFFERINGS.
- ¹⁷ THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT;
A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART,
O GOD, YOU WILL NOT DESPISE.
- ¹⁸ IN YOUR GOOD PLEASURE MAKE ZION PROSPER;
BUILD UP THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.
- ¹⁹ THEN THERE WILL BE RIGHTEOUS SACRIFICES,
WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS TO DELIGHT YOU;
THEN BULLS WILL BE OFFERED ON YOUR ALTAR.

AND WHEN MY HEART IS RIGHT, THEN YOU WILL REJOICE IN THE GOOD THAT I DO AND IN THE BULLOCKS I BRING TO SACRIFICE UPON YOUR ALTAR. (*LIVING BIBLE*)

A WORSHIPPER'S PRAYER

CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD AND RENEW A RIGHT SPIRIT WITHIN ME SO THAT MY WORSHIP WILL BE WITHOUT HYPOCRISY. I WANT TO HONOR YOU WITH A PURE AND RIGHTEOUS LIFE. HELP ME, LORD. YOU ARE MY STRENGTH AND MY PERFECTER. YOU ARE MY JOY AND THE REASON FOR MY WORSHIP. (NIV WORSHIP BIBLE)