

Another Look at Worship

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Review Part 1

Chapter 1 – Discovery of Worship: Why, How, and When we should Worship

*“I will extol Thee, my God, O king; and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever.
Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.”*
Psalm 145:1,13

Part 1 – Growing in Praise

Historically in the Church, a vast number of individuals have categorized “praise” as “silliness.” It seems to them to be illogical to the intellect. But the fact that God is worthy of our praise is the only real logical point to consider. From the point of praise and acknowledging Who God is, we must move on into faith and obedience.

When we praise God, it is *we* who are changed. Once we know Him and personally value His worth, we cannot – will not – remain the same. It is *our obedience* to His commands that triggers a personal transformation and our faith is activated.

It is quite normal for us to have seen ourselves as the recipients of God’s love, care, and provision. He is the Father; we’re the children. He’s the Shepherd; we’re the sheep. He’s the healer; we’re in need of His touch. He is the Giver and faithfully supplies our needs and essentially, our basic prayer has been “Give me, Lord.”

Let us see this position as receiver in its true identity – *immaturity*. Little children don’t honor the Father except out of fear. They *expect* provision; they count on it. And, we want our own little children to expect from us as well. It is our delight to provide for their needs. All we look for from them is a simple attitude of “Thank you.” That’s good for children. But let’s look at a particular verse for God’s perspective. Malachi 1:6 asks: “*If you say I am Father, where is My honor?*” This is spoken to *mature sons* – not to children. As grown up sons and daughters, more is expected in relationship. Selah.

We can only enter into His Gates with thanksgiving (Ps.100:4) – and must do so in that way. But these days, God is revealing Himself in a greater magnitude than ever before – now as Lord and King. This new level or dimension of revelation does not indicate we are to be any less grateful or to stop thanking Him for all He does for us. It adds something new to our relationship.

There are three areas in which God is revealed when we come into genuine worship and praise. **First**, we see Him as the **Father** of a son (or daughter). As we become mature enough to realize Who He is and what He’s done for us, and what He consistently and continuously does, we grow to love Him because He’s our *Father* – He birthed us and we receive from Him.

Secondly, we see Him as **Lord** and Master – relating to Him not as friends but as servants. In this relationship, we are ready to give as well as to receive. Our lack of understanding of Him in this area has lost us something of the correct *fear of the Lord*. We often act as if we run or manage Him. And there are those individuals who suggest we can “command” Him. Theirs is a misunderstanding of Isaiah 45:11 – which is a phrase properly buried in its context there. It actually is a question by God to us: “*command thou Me?*” The implied answer is “No” in view of Who He is. A quiet and humble “No.”

This God we serve is not a helpless little dependent baby in the manger. He is “*high and lifted up, and His train fills the temple!*” (Is.6:1) And the angels in His Presence declared, “*Holy! Holy! Holy!*” (vs.3).

Isaiah, coming to a greater realization of Who his God was/is – cried out, “*Woe is me! for I am undone...*” (vs.5).

Where is that attitude today? “*What is man that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?*” (Ps.8:4) How long has it been since we held Him in the highest awe?

Without this awe-filled awareness of God, we still can learn the practice of praise but it will become just one more church tradition. It even can be delightful to us and acceptable to the Lord, but not produce in the praiser a life-change! Many churches have adopted “Praise” as a part of their order of service – now it’s three songs, PRAISE, and prayer. ☺

The awe-filled awareness of who God is comes by our submitting to Him and allowing His Holy Spirit to reveal Him to us. He is – the King of all kings – and the Lord of all – of all in heaven and of all the earth and all that dwells therein (1Tim.6:15; Rev.17:14; Ps.24:1; Ps.72:11). Truly seeing that as FACT takes away any pride in us. He doesn’t need to allow us to humiliate ourselves through some foolish actions. He simply begins to reveal Himself more completely. The more we see Him clearly, as He is, the more we comprehend Him as ruling and reigning over all creation.

We must have revelation before we can worship. When we know Him, we’ll have no trouble giving the honor due Him. It’s not in learning methods of praise or worship. It’s not in making noise, or saying all the right words trying to recite a formula. We simply need to respond to the revelation of the knowledge of God. We must see Him before we can know how to praise Him. Regardless of our circumstances or temporal situations, we still love Him and thank Him and adore Him. We are His – and all we have is His – for now we have established that He is Lord!

Hebrews 13:15 makes it clear: “*By Him (Jesus), therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.*” He desires our verbal praise, and is worthy to receive it. “*...in everything give thanks...*” (1Thes.5:18) God will use everything about our lives to teach us the way we should go (Ps.25:4,5; Is.30:21; Jn.14:6; Ac.18:25,26).

A sacrifice of praise. A sacrifice involves giving up something we have a right to keep because it is ours. The praise of and for God that lives within us needs to come out. Our *lives* must be a sacrifice of praise – even when we don’t feel like it. Praise is an act of our will – a decision – a choice we make. It’s an “I will.” I will praise Him! He is God – all knowledge – all power – all might – all wisdom – all righteousness – all lovingkindness – all tender mercy – and He is mindful of us and has a plan for us! (Jer.29:11)

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Chapter 1 – Discovery of Worship: Why, How, and When we should Worship

Part 2 – What is worship?

The word worship means “to depress or bow oneself down in honoring and reverencing the Lord.” Worship can be in thought or action and extends to prostration of the body or falling down before the one worshipped.

How long has it been that the sense of His Presence has caused us to *worship* at His feet? Too many of us can’t even lift our hands to Him! (1Tim.2:8; Ps.63:4). We are so self-conscious and dependent on what others think and we simply want to be *comfortable* – so we consent to a clap offering – which is, of course, an acceptable though worldly practice (we do it readily at ball games or concerts). At least we can applaud when He does something good – but that is not *worship*. **Worship is an expression that comes from an inner sense of reverence or awe relating more to Who He is than what He does.**

There is a *prevalent but erroneous idea* that we should worship the Lord only when we *feel* like it, and that it always should be an instantaneous and spontaneous response. Know this: God is always worthy of our praise regardless of how we *feel* about anything!

The Bible specifically teaches us the ways of worship, why God wants us to worship Him, and how He wants worship to be expressed. Worship doesn't "just happen" – it is something we *learn* to do. It is the recognition of the worth-ship, or worthiness of God. And *that* is revealed by His Spirit to individual hearts that are eager to learn and grow. It is a revelation of Who He is – not what He does. It is not the ordaining or instruction given of a specific method, but the personal awareness of Who He is. He is the Almighty God, the Great I AM, Creator of all things!

When we sing, "*We worship and adore Thee, bowing down before Thee...*," we don't have to make a scene or public display to express our worship. What is important is the attitude of reverence and adoration in our hearts. Who fills our thoughts at that moment? Is it the greatness of our God?

Worship without praise is unexpressed and praise without worship is empty, void, and just a lot of words. To praise means "to laud in honor, to shine, to boast and brag about." We need to brag on Him! We need to give glory to God! He can and will dwell in the praises of His people (Ps.22:3) and as He responds in that way, His Presence becomes experiential to those who truly have become worshippers.

It is helpful and instructive to understand the meanings of particular Hebrew (Old Testament) words used in Scripture relating to praise and worship. Note they are all verbs – words expressing action.

To bless /barak/ – means "to kneel down and continue to give thanks in homage" (a deferential show of reverence) as *an act* of adoration. Psalm 63:4; 26:12; 34:1; 96:2; 103:1

To be thankful /towdah/ – means "to hold out the hands" and implies adoration. The Holy Spirit wants us *to get involved* with our hearts in thanksgiving. By exerting ourselves physically beyond acceptable words, we become more focused on the real meaning behind what we say – so we raise our hands in gratitude. Psalm 69:30; 147:7; 107:22; 50:14; 95:2; 100:4

Rejoice /guwl/ – One Hebrew word translated "rejoice" means "to jump up and spin around for joy" and involves strong emotion. It is one way to *express our delight* in the Lord. Psalm 89:16; 118:24; 2:11; 9:14; 97:1; Isa.35:1,2

To exceedingly rejoice /alats/ – means "to be bright and cheerful; exult." This is a jumping for joy that is an exultation and it's a choice we must make. We have to do it. Our dreary circumstances may not change all day long, but we still can *be bright and cheerful* – and that is not hypocrisy regardless of what the enemy accuses you. **Our rejoicing is in the Lord, not in our feelings or circumstances.** He never changes. And we can revere Him in total admiration and worship. Psalm 68:3; 9:2; Pr.28:12

To extol or exalt /ruwm/ – is "to set higher than anything else." Because of the greater revelation of God as King and Lord over all, we can come to this *expression* of the highest, greatest possible admiration. He should be "*high and lifted up*" in our minds! Psalm 145:1; 30:1; 34:3; 99:5,9; 118:28; Isa.25:1

There are several more words that describe our praise and worship and we could study them from the Hebrew, but let's allow these few to spark our worship. We know Moses *sang* in worship (Rev.15:3) and David "*danced unto the lord with all his might*" (2Sam.6:14). Note that he danced "*before the Lord.*" Using the phrase "in the spirit" to describe our dance can lead to a misconstruing of what actually occurred in the natural movement of the physical body. There is no room for irresponsibility in worship because we think His Spirit is in control. WE are in control of all our actions. And the truth is, God does want all of us – completely – spirit, soul, and body (Deut.6:5; Mk.12:30).

When we are so excited in the Presence of the Lord, as David was, we also will want to remove what hinders our expression of adoration and delight in Him. David stripped off his kingly garments and gave all he was and had to the Lord. That's what dancing is all about – setting aside our entrapments and focusing only on Him.

We can shout, clap, lift our hands, and make a joyful noise to the Lord. We can kneel, fall prostrate before Him, and praise Him with instruments. “*The joy of the Lord is our strength!*” (Neh.8:10) and *that* may cause us to laugh in spite of ourselves. ☺ All forms of worship are done in the assembly (congregation), but we can also express our worship to Him when we're all alone as well.

Praising God opens two channels in our lives – the channel of love and the channel of faith. It is through these two channels we receive everything we get from God. The enemy works cleverly and diligently to shut both of them down in our lives. He'll use everything negative against us from our past (that we'll allow) to cut us off from receiving the love of God – or from expressing it back to Him. Hurts, disappointments, unmet needs, lies, broken trust – the devil will cause disbelief to rule our thoughts. As we begin to praise God, the clogged channels begin to open before Him and we can learn to love and trust.

We sing “*From glory to glory He's changing me.*” How? As we behold Him, we “*are changed into the same image*” (2Cor.3:18). And through growing faith, we are able to receive from Him everything His heart has longed to give us. So, **as we worship He is able to perfect us** – to bring us to greater maturity. And as we grow in Him, and worship from our hearts, He will reveal to us whatever we need to see about ourselves. That revelation will bring release to our lives – the revelation that we are only because of His shed blood that covers us. We have nothing we haven't received (Mt.10:8). We are nothing without Him. That truth causes us to worship Him in ever increasing freedom.

Other Hebrew words for “praise:”

Praise /yadah/ – “to use the hand;” hold out the hand to revere or worship – Ps.7:17; 9:1; 28:7; 30:12; 33:2; 42:11; 86:12

Praise - /halah/ - “to be clear; to shine; to make a show, to boast; to be clamorously foolish; to rave; celebrate – Ps.22:22, 23, 26; 63:5

Praise /tehillah/ - laudation; hymn; from /halah/ - Ps.9:14; 22:25; 33:1; 34:1

Praise /zamar/ - striking with the fingers; touch the strings; play on a musical instrument – Ps.21:13; 57:7

Praise /shabach/ - to address in loud tone; “glory” – Ps.63:3

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Chapter 2 – Dedication of Worship – Devoting Ourselves to Worship

“I will extol Thee, my God, O King; and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever.

Every day will I bless Thee; and I will praise Thy name for ever and ever”

Psalm145:1,2

Part 1 – Adjusting Our Focus

God wants us to be real and He's aware of our frailties and the negatives of life. The enemy has many effective strategies he employs to get us to cease worshipping God. One of those is to accuse us of being unworthy to come to God at all because we have failed to be *perfect*. Truth: God wants us to come – regardless – because while we're in His Presence, focusing on Him, changes will be made in us. When the Lord said, “*The light of the body is the eye*” (Mt.6:22), He meant that **we become full of whatever has been our focus**. Thus the admonition found in Hebrews 12:2 – “*fixing our eyes upon Jesus.*”

Worship adjusts our focus. It even helps us put our personal troubles into proper perspective. The more we focus on our problems, the bigger they loom before us. That is not to say we are to ignore difficulties

or pretend they do not exist. The more we worship God, however, the more we understand and assimilate the truth of 1 John 4:4 – that He is greater than anything out there that sets itself up against us.

Let’s remember that **“praise” is not our goal – God is**. Praise is the route to come into His Presence, not a method to get our own way. It also is not a means of getting God to fix all our negatives.

There is a common misunderstanding that we are to praise and thank God for every bad thing that happens to us. How can we do that and not be liars? Praise under adverse circumstances *is* possible **because we reach beyond the negative to the Lord**. It is “in” everything we give thanks (1Thes.5:18), not *for* everything. But it all begins with an underlying attitude of gratitude.

Psalm 100:4 – we “*enter His gates with thanksgiving.*” This is the only access we have to His Presence. There is one gate (thanksgiving), one court (praise), and then the Holy Place of His Presence. If His Presence is our goal, we must recognize that thank-*less*-ness is one of the first steps away from God (Rom.1:21). Furthermore, it is a mark of the perilous times of the last days (2Tim.3:1,2).

To understand worship and praise, we must have a comprehension of the difference between ministering unto God and ministering unto people. In Ezekiel 44 we see this distinction made by God (Ezk.44:9-16). When the ancient Israelites went astray from God, the problem was they wanted to be like their neighbors who were pagan worshippers. God was invisible and intangible to them and it was more meaningful for them to hug a tangible idol (Selah!).

The Levites (priests) succumbed to the desires of the people and *allowed the mixture* of pagan religious practices, mistakenly thinking that as long as the people still worshipped the true and living God too it was okay. They apparently had forgotten their own Law wherein God had forbidden such practices – and still does! (Ex.20:3-5; Jer.35:15; Mk.12:29,30). Only the sons of Zadok, an old family of priests, refused to allow this syncretistic practice of accepting and adopting specific practices from a number of religions, combining them into an individual’s *personalized* system of religious practices (Ezk.44:15). Only these priests were committed to the pure worship of God and were unwilling to make it more *palatable* for the people.

Today, we don’t cling to idols made of silver or wood, but we still try to *compromise* the strength of the Word. We want “user-friendly” in our lives from electronics to church! Man wants to do everything “in his own way” (Jud.17:6; 21:25). Just as the Israelites did (which was their undoing!), we want to tailor-make our religious practices so they “*fit me.*” We even want to worship God employing only certain specific practices with which we are *comfortable*. We forget or ignore or never were taught that God designed worship, and we are to come to Him *His* way.

From the Ezekiel 44 passage, we learn that God limited the role of the errant Levitical priests from that time on – because they had allowed the people to include idol worship along with the prescribed animal sacrifices offered to God with purpose. That practice “*caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity*” (vs.12) and God held the priests accountable. They were no longer allowed to minister in the Holy Place of the Temple – not allowed in the intimacy of His Presence – because of their mixtures.

Only the sons of Zadok “*that kept the charge*” during that rebellious time were allowed to *minister to God* or stand before Him (vs.15). These priests – and we are all priests unto God (1Pet.2:5,9; Rev.1:6;5:10) – who maintained the ways of God, the sons of Zadok, were given this charge: Ezekiel 44:23 – “*And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.*”

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Chapter 2 – Dedication of Worship – Devoting Ourselves to Worship

“They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and profane...” Ezekiel 44:23

Part 2 – Making the Distinctions between Holy and Profane

Doing things our own way only leads to dead-end paths or even to our destruction (Mt.7:13). **What we really need is a divine encounter with God.** It has always been God’s plan that every time *we* speak to a person they would hear *God* – that through our actions they would know the actions of God. Jesus did this – and set the example and standard for us who follow Him (see Jn.8:28,29).

But we have lost the Presence of God – and the fear of God. Why is that? How did it happen? How is it that it doesn’t matter if a prophetic word comes or praise is being sung to God, we can totally ignore it while we read the bulletin with all its inserts? Why is church boring to so many? I believe the answer is because we have chosen to minister to *people*. We are comfortable in the Outer Court. We see a beautiful picture of God’s grace in Ezekiel 44:11, for God did not reject (or kill) the Levitical priests – He allowed them to be ministers in the sanctuary, but with *limited duties*. They were still priests but now people-oriented and therefore they had become servants of (not unto) the people. God was no longer their Lord, the people were.

Today, when that happens, and it does all too often, our “priests” (pastors, leaders) don’t understand that the problem exists or that it is theirs. They have become people-oriented, people-centered, people-controlled, with the people becoming master. Now the Lord reveals that there is a limitation to this kind of ministry. *“They cannot come near Me”* (Ezk.44:13). Their services were good and needed, but what a price, or penalty, to pay!

That is one way God has of dealing with us and showing us there is a problem in our lives. He withdraws His fellowship – not *relationship* for we are always His children – but we lose that sweet communion. And then *we* cry, “Lord, where are you?” as if the problem is His.

We can choose to be a “son of Zadok.” You can read part of the story in 2 Samuel 15. When the Israelites were choosing sides against David, Zadok remained faithful to him because he believed in David’s anointing and calling. Who is *our* David? Jesus is. Before we can really praise the Lord we are going to have to learn what commitment means, the kind displayed by Zadok.

Picture the priestly ministry at the Tabernacle of the Wilderness (Ex.24-30). These sons of Zadok were now the only priests that could come near to God and minister to Him in the Holy Place (Ezk.44:15). To be able to do that, sin had to be dealt with first at the Brazen Altar, then daily defilements (acts of sin) were washed clean at the Laver, a type of the Word. After that, with the illumination of the Holy Spirit represented by the Golden Candlestick, *we* (priests after the example of Zadok) can eat at the Table of Shewbread, a type of fellowship with the Lord, and minister at the Golden Altar, which speaks of prayer and praise.

It is important for us to understand that our fellowship with others is limited or blessed by the extent of our fellowship with God. Unless we come His way, we will be just like others, doing things in the name of God, blessing people in the name of the Lord, but never knowing the Lord of that name. God is looking for people, priests, who will live in the Holy Place, who will dwell in the *“secret place of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty”* (Ps.91). Our fellowship with God will enable us to minister both to God and to people.

There has never been a time of greater need in the church than today for us to be able to differentiate between the holy and profane. *Profane* doesn’t mean taking the name of the Lord in vain (Ex.20:7), or what we commonly refer to as profanity. It means – “that which is common or unholy;” anything that is not ordained of God; anything that doesn’t originate with Him. Furthermore, it is an unwillingness to put God’s value system above one’s own desire.

The priests who came near to God had the wisdom of God, the mind of God, and the Word of God. This is not learned in a school for priests but learned in the Presence of God Himself. A **key** in knowing how to *discern* between the holy and profane is to adopt worship as a way of life, not just an activity we do in church. It is really becoming like the sons of Zadok – so one with God, so one with the Spirit, one in the Lord, one in the Word, that whatever He says to me, that’s what I am going to do. My desire is to be fellowshiping with God, loving Him, and receiving His love. It is me – truly dedicating myself to Him so that He can set me apart for holy use – or, *consecrate* me.

The more we see of God the more we want to be with Him and the more we realize we don’t have anything to give Him. So, He gives it to us. If we worship God as a true worshipper (Jn.4:24), we probably won’t have any problems with pride! I have nothing good in me that He did not first give to me. That includes the love I have for Him.

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Chapter 2 – Dedication of Worship: Devoting Ourselves to Worship

Part 3 – Choosing His Ways

In Song of Solomon, the Shulamite says of the King, “*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine*” (1:2). We can never say that of *our* King unless we know what it is to face Him. Our attitude often is quite reversed, “*Lord, you may kiss my hand. I’ll serve You, whatever it is You want me to do, so bless me.*” But God wants us in a love relationship with Himself.

We find this difficult in the church because we have refused the truth of the word *involvement*. In the world we often hear, “*I just didn’t want to get involved.*” How tragic to find the same attitude in the Body of Christ! We must be able to acknowledge that people have been hurt in the church, even *we* have been hurt. But we must not allow that to cause us to withdraw – not wanting to “get involved” because that could lead to more hurt. We need to take those painful situations to Father for Him to handle, and quit talking about them! It’s in the past, let it go. Now, **God wants us to be involved – *with Him***. His desire is that we become deeply, personally, intimately involved with our Lord. One way to do that is through praise.

When we focus completely on Him, we truly come to *love* Him. Now men, God will help you bypass gender issues when you are worshipping in the language of human love, using words that we usually affix to making love to your wives. God is referred to as masculine and that can be, at first, a hindrance for men to use words like “dear,” “sweet,” “precious,” “wonderful,” and “I adore you” when worshipping Him. Let us remember that it is *our spirits* that communicate love to God and employing the language of the Spirit helps us in expressing our worship to Him. The key is to focus on Who God is – the Almighty God, Creator of everything that exists – and soon our words of love will flow and be beautiful to Him. But we must come to know the intimacy that **desires above all else** to make love to our God. As priests unto Him, we learn to minister to Him.

For the priests in Ezekiel 44 who had compromised, perhaps the greatest penalty was that they could no longer function in the office of the *priest unto God*. They could pray on behalf of the people, but they could not pray on behalf of God’s concerns! We need to pray for one another as the Bible teaches, bearing one another’s burdens in the Lord which is fulfilling the very law of Christ’s existence (Gal.6:2). But there is another kind of praying that comes from that place of being in the very Presence of God.

There are times when we come to Him in prayer that He brings face after face to our remembrance. We may know nothing of the circumstances of these people, good or bad, but we pray for them. We pray in English and we pray in the spirit by the power of *His* Spirit. There are other times when we come in prayer just to love Him. All the time, we should come before Him caring about His heartbeat – concerned with the things about which He is concerned. Let’s understand that when the Lord gives us an honest and

sincere burden from Him (not something we make up), He intends to meet that need. It's not difficult to pray with faith when the Lord says, "I'm concerned about this."

One last point about the limitations of the priests of Ezekiel 44. "*They cannot come near to any of My holy things*" (vs.13). This is an interesting thing for they *are* in the sanctuary and able to make the sacrifices with all the *holy* implements. Note that they can touch what man calls holy but not what God calls holy.

There are many things we dub holy that are not holy at all in the sight of God. God wants to lift us another step, into a new dimension of understanding that some activity could be a very holy thing but it might be *more holy* if we did something else. If we are going to be directed by the Lord, if we are going to be God-controlled and Christ-centered, then He is Lord and becomes Lord over everything.

There is a trap set for us by the enemy. When we (women) involve ourselves in "holy" activities, even participating in church prayer meetings, we must not let everything that concerns the care of our families fall by the wayside. We need to be a loving wife, prepare proper meals, clean the house, and respond to the other needs of our families appropriately. Men have their own entrapments different from ours. But we share this in common: **what God calls holy is a balanced life – rightly-related to Him and all those around us.** These compromising priests could rise to what men call heights, but not what God calls heights. He looks on the heart (1Sam.16:7) and discerns.

And – He is exercising His authority in His church. We must be careful to respond to His direction given specifically to us, not what He is directing another church to adopt or do. First, we must find out what He is actually saying to us, as individuals and as individual churches.

God approved the sons of Zadok. There were to be qualifications for them if they were to minister to God. It demanded *holiness* ("*without which no man shall see God*" Heb.12:14). Holy means to *set apart* for special service. It is remaining *separated*. This is not legalism, but willful and loving obedience to His ways. **It is making Him Lord of all, not keeping a list of do's and don'ts.**

There may be (probably *will be*) areas of our lives that God says must be changed – things we have been doing for years must now cease. When God says to let go, we must do it. It is a spiritual circumcision that may work out in our "flesh" as well – the Holy Spirit cutting off some things. Let us learn to respond immediately, not attempting to bargain with God. We are in process, working out our salvation in practical terms (Phil.2:12). God will guide us with His eye (Ps.32:8) and that will become our delight!

God may also want to bring something new to our lives to be holy. He may add ministries and giftings that can flow from us as we learn to be dedicated in worship unto Him. In that dedication, we begin to be changed, our perspective becomes enlarged, and we realize the most important thing is not what we get from God, but that we can come to God – and minister to Him.

We minister to God through praise and praise-filled living. Our praise is something we can freely give to Him. Isaiah 29:1 and 2 – "*Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*"

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Chapter 3 – Discipline of Worship – Willfully Worshipping God

*"I will extol Thee, my God, O King; and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever.
Every day will I bless Thee; and I will praise Thy name for ever and ever"* Psalm145:1,2

Part 1 – An Act of the Will

Let's first agree that although we are going to discuss the "*Discipline of Worshipping God*" we are not talking about a legalism that is made up of rules others demand of us to meet their ends. Rather, this **discipline is what we require of ourselves because we want the result it will bring.**

Worship is the only thing that will never pass away. Prayer will pass away, for in heaven we will be in the very Presence of God, worshipping Him with all our might! (Rev.5). Perhaps that is why it is so difficult for us to come to *true worship* now. The enemy fights against our worship more than He fights against prayer. He must know that when we pray in faith God will come, but our prayers are not always so filled with faith and expectation. When we praise and worship Him and suddenly recognize He is there with us, we can believe Him for anything! So, as we discipline ourselves to worship we discover that it brings His Presence.

One wonderful result of His Presence is that it makes us *fearless*. We can be just like Daniel in the lions' den (Dan.6:10ff), or the 3 young men in the fiery furnace (Dan.3:11ff). They all believed God was with them in every circumstance of life and that He would take care of them in the worst of them – and He did! (Dan.3:15-18; 6:16-22). We may not know what tomorrow will bring, but we can be *fearless* in the knowledge that He is with us – *unafraid because of the Presence of the Lord*.

His Presence also brings us *freedom*. Instead of offering time at the altar for prayer at the *close* of our services, what if we invited people to *begin* with a season of prayer and praise and worship? That would cause us to be tuned to His Presence before we even begin our services. People would know God was there the sick would be healed, the discouraged encouraged, and every need would be supplied. In His Presence, we may even forget our troubles and needy petitions as we worship and adore Him and delight in just being there with Him. I believe in that atmosphere and attitude of heart, He will set us *free* without even asking Him.

Further, God wants to bring us *joy* – "*In thy presence is fullness of joy*" (Ps.16:11). Once we taste *His* joy, we are ruined for anything less than that. He wants us so ruined that we will never be satisfied with less than the joy found in His Presence. Once experienced, nothing will satisfy us like being in His Presence.

With all of that available to us, how can we not press on into a life of praising God? He has raised up teachers, given instruction and keys to His Presence, and He wants us to use those to unlock the door. The underlying principle is found in the opening words of our foundational scripture: Psalm 145:1. "*I will.*" Disciplined worship is an act of the will.

Many people have a problem with the worship leader working up or pumping up praise in the service. Actually, it is very scriptural to "force praise" or, command praise. But it is not scriptural to work up an *emotional response* to praise. Too often we experience places where emotion carries the music and the people enter into the *feelings* of the beat or sound itself. What the Bible teaches is: in spite of whether or not we *feel* like it, we're to praise the Lord.

Hebrews 13:15 encourages us to "*offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.*" That's fairly clear. ☺ Consistently, we are to be praising God because we have Christ, we know Him, and because He will enable us to give praise and gratitude and worship to the Father. Our part is to let the words come from our mouths. The key word here is *sacrifice*. It means there is something we have a right to maintain for ourselves, it belongs to us, but we have the privilege of offering it to another. *This* sacrifice is not an obligation – the scripture says, "*Let us...*" So, if we love Jesus, *let us* offer the fruit of our lips.

We find a similar verbal construction in Psalm 107:22 – "*And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing.*" The word for *rejoicing* here is like a *shout of triumph*. That's easy when we are in His Presence but then it's not a real sacrifice. In times, however, when we don't feel like praising the Lord, faith must come forth as the evidence of what we do not see at

that moment (Heb.11:1). Faith then serves as the sensory capacity for our spirits so that we can see through the eyes of the Spirit into the natural realm. In those difficult or painful times, the carnal mind asks “For what shall I be thankful?”

When I have asked that question (and I have), the Lord graciously has shown me the plight of others and all the ways He has cared for me and carried me. I need the Holy Spirit to remind me of the goodness of God toward me – the thoughts of His goodness bring me to repentance (Rom.2:4) and I praise Him. This kind of *sacrifice* needs to be restored to the Church. And God is restoring praise and worship, adoration and the cry of the heart for Him.

John 4:14 says the Holy Spirit in us is *a well*. Some people have their wells capped tightly. One day that seal is going to break open like a pressure cooker! And then the joy of the Lord will spring forth like a mighty river (Jn.7:38). This flow of life is what the world is waiting for and must be able to see in us.

Why don't we have standing-room only in our services? When people begin to see the crystal clear river of water coming forth from the people of God because the well has been permitted to erupt – they will come. **The release begins when we break forth in true praise and worship.** When the sacrifices of praise are offered, the channels of faith and love in us will become unclogged. It will result in the flow of life – His life – flowing from and through His people. Then others will become so thirsty when they begin to see trickles of the reality of the flow of His life, that nothing will be able to keep them away! When Jesus' Presence is there, He ministers to every need and brings forth every divine provision. God wants us to be living in these higher levels – today.

The *sacrifice of praise* also dispels darkness and depression. We experience heartache and loss in life. During those dark times, it is so hard to raise our faces toward the Lord and praise Him. We may have to begin speaking the words of praise through clenched teeth, out of pure obedience to the promptings of His Spirit, but praise we must! **God is always worthy of our praise** – even if we figure He could have stepped in on our behalf and didn't – He still is worthy of our praise. I can testify through personal experience that as we press in to praising our King, extolling His greatness, the darkness will begin to lift and the despair will depart the room. It doesn't take long for our worship to become real once again.

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Chapter 3 – Discipline of Worship – Willfully Worshipping God

Part 2 – What Makes the Difference?

Is praise the end? Oh no – praise opens the door. It's a pathway for His Presence to come and in His Presence there is fullness of joy, a delight to our heart. In His Presence there is Light. In the Presence of the Lord, there is the Savior that is necessary for each of us. As we offer the *sacrifice of praise* (Heb.13:15), it releases faith so that we can receive what we need from Him.

A good example is Jonah. Jonah was called by God to prophesy a warning to the people of Nineveh of God's impending judgment upon them. Jonah tried to reason with God about why he didn't want to go to Nineveh and ended up running away in the opposite direction. You know the story: Jonah boards a ship for Tarshish and shortly, a great and dangerous storm arises, sent by, of course, God. The men on the ship tried to figure out whose God was destroying them and the lot fell to Jonah, asleep in the hold. We often do the same thing. We are doing what we want and so we close ourselves off from hearing anything else.

Jonah owned up to his problem and the others threw him overboard. God sent salvation to Jonah in the form of a great fish that swallowed him alive. There he stayed for three days, in the belly of a whale. God was getting Jonah into a new place of living. I hate to imagine his existence – dead fish, water flowing in all directions, seaweed floating toward him. I can think of that as my plans -- the seaweed of

my own actions and doings and rebellions toward God. It began to wrap itself around him. Jonah's prayer had to go something like this: "Okay, I'll go to Nineveh. But why *this*? Why God?" When we do it, it's just a pity party for we usually know the answer to our own questions.

A second day in the fish – there was Jonah, imprisoned by his own actions of disobedience to God's clear direction. Hmmmm. ☺ Encased in my own problems and plans and there's nothing I can do now. Interesting, like Jonah, we don't hear from God on days one or two. Sometimes when we aren't receiving answers, we ought to tape record our prayers, play them back, and listen to what we're saying. We might hear a whine: "I don't understand why I'm going through this." And there's no comment from God.

The third day. I imagine Jonah's prayers are changing. They've probably sounded a lot like begging. ☺ Then, he makes a decision. Chapter 2, verse 9: "*I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving.*" Jonah *chose* to make a sacrifice of praise to God.

What about you? Are you standing on your tiptoes, just trying to keep your head above water, surrounded by the debris of all your ambitions, goals, desires, aims, everything you started out to do, with all of it coming to nothing? And all your self-efforts are like seaweed around your feet? And the stench of those failures fills your nostrils? Do you feel as if you're at the end of things, and if one more negative happens, you're through? Are you saying, "God, I can't take one more thing. I've prayed and sought Your face and I just can't do anything else."

Here's the secret: "*I will offer unto Thee a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Lord, I thank You that I'm standing here on tiptoe and still have breathing room! Thank You, Lord, for this moment.*"

Verse 10. "*The Lord spake unto the fish.*" Why? Was this a test of endurance? No. God was waiting for a channel of love and faith to open through which He could move, and when Jonah said, "*I will thank Him,*" he opened that channel to experience the Lord's deliverance and plan for his life. He was now ready to receive from the Lord.

There's another story about disciplined worship in the Bible we must see. Mark 14. It's the story of the woman with the alabaster box (also Mt.26 and Jn.12). There is a feast for the Lord and this woman sees Him there. From deep within her heart comes the cry to give something important to Him. She finds her box of expensive ointment, breaks it over His head and feet, and wipes them with her hair. The disciples look with indignation at the waste but Jesus declares it was done as a token before His burial and would be a memorial for this woman throughout the ages. And so, here we are looking at her act of love and sacrifice over 2000 years later!

What can we learn? **First**, we see that **worship is costly**. It will cost us something. It may cost our security. This ointment was worth at least a year's salary. It was hers and it represented her future security. When we begin to praise and worship the Lord, there is nothing quite as insecure as that. We don't know if we're doing it "right" or if we should be doing it at all. We don't know for how long to do it, and we're not certain if we really mean the words. Very insecure place.

When we surrender the "order of the service" to the control of the Lord, there is little security of knowing what's going to happen next. That makes most leaders nervous. When one person is lost in worship and the rest of us are waiting for them to "return" – there's a lot of insecurity there. But if we'll wait on the Lord, that one person, loving Him and worshipping all alone can literally bring His Presence into that service. That happened with my mother many years ago (and many times!). As she lingered in the throne-room, unaware the service was waiting for her, it became infectious. Finally the whole church began to rise again and stand in the Presence of His glory. **The one thing we can be secure in is the confidence that God's control will always bring us to the highest place in worship we are able to reach.**

The Lord touches the spirit of man, the intellect and emotions of man (soul), and even our bodies, for we are a triune being. Every service ought to touch each one of these areas in us. As God touches us we respond in the triune. Most of us are learning (or have learned) to respond with our spirits and intellect. We can sense His Presence spiritually and we can know Him through our intellect. But a lot of people withhold their emotions and movement from Him. We can't or are afraid to show love or joy or demonstrate His peace. We're even reluctant to raise our hands in honor to Him or in reaching out to Him.

The Lord is trying to teach us to live differently. He is attempting to produce His life in us so that our emotions express the reality of our spirit and we present all that we are to Him. The lady in the scripture was willing to bring all she had to the Lord. She brought something of great worth and poured it out upon Him. Can we pour out our pride as an offering to Him?

The **second** thing we can see is that **worship requires being broken**. She didn't just hand Him the box. That's what many of us try to do. She *broke* the box before she could present its contents to Him. I believe the Lord is endeavoring to teach us the hammer of His Word (Jer.23:29), to break up our fallow ground (Hos.10:12). It's time for us to get into the Word of God and let it penetrate our hearts causing a breaking of our stubborn wills, or our pride, or our prejudices.

This is not just tears. Tears are good and an opportunity of pouring out before Him, but you can be broken before the Lord without tears, and you can shed tears without being broken. Many tears we shed at the altar are tears of guilt and self-pity. The tears that God saves are those that are birthed in trust (Ps.56).

Third – worship will invoke criticism. Judas' accusation was subtle in that it sounded so "spiritual." Today, the major criticism within the church herself is that worship "takes too much time." All I can ask is, what is the purpose of the congregational gathering if it isn't to minister to God? Worship, in all of it's expressions, ministers to our God.

Fourth – worship becomes reciprocal with the Lord. As we bring to Him our brokenness and pour out everything that we are before Him, it is a sweet fragrance to Him, and we have pleased the heart of God. Then He pours out His love to us. We have but to open the channel of love, open the channel of faith, and God will pour back such a blessing upon us! It will be so great we will barely be able to contain it!

Disciplined worship. I *will* praise the Lord – every day – good days and bad. Let us develop a pattern of worship now, on this earth, for we will worship Him throughout eternity!