



WORSHIP

Essential Lessons for Christian Leaders



BRUCE ZACHARY

Worship:
Essential Lessons for Christian Leaders

Bruce Zachary

Velo Publishing
Copyright 2003 by Bruce Zachary
Printed in the United States of America

Velo Publishing
380 Mobil Avenue
Camarillo, California 93010
Phone (805) 384-1182
Email: info@calvarynexus.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

All Scripture quotations in this book, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	4
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Purpose	8
REQUIRED	8
RESPONSIVE	15
PURPOSE STUDY GUIDE	21
Chapter 1: Person	22
WHO GOD IS	22
WHO WE ARE	26
PERSON STUDY GUIDE	27
Chapter 3: Preparation	29
Problem of Pride	30
Problem of Pressure	32
Pursuit of Purity	33
Price of Preparation	36
PREPARATION STUDY GUIDE	38
Chapter 4: Presence	39
THE PREPARATION FOR ENTERING	39
THE PRESENCE EXPERIENCE	43
Shekinah	43
Shine	45
Seek	47
Serve	49
PRESENCE STUDY GUIDE	50
Chapter 5: Passion	52
TYPES	52
TESTS	58
PASSION STUDY GUIDE	63
Chapter 6: Power	65
DILEMMA	65
DEFEAT	68
DELIVERY	73
POWER STUDY GUIDE	76
Chapter 7: Praise	77
WHY WE PRAISE	77
REQUIRED	78
RIGHT	78
REASONABLE	79
REVEALING	81
RESPONSIVE	82
HOW TO PRAISE	85
MESSAGE	85
MUSIC	87
MODERN	89
PRAISE STUDY GUIDE	92
Chapter 8: Participation	93
WHY WE PARTICIPATE	93
PATTERN	93
PURPOSE	95
PRESCRIBED	96

PRIVILEGE.....	97
PREPARE	99
HOW TO HELP PEOPLE PARTICIPATE.....	99
REPETITION	100
RATIO	100
REMEMBER	100
RESPECT	100
RESPONSE	101
RESTRAINT	102
REHEARSAL	102
PARTICIPATION STUDYGUIDE.....	103
Chapter 9: Conclusion.....	104

Introduction

Do you remember the first time that you went to church? I remember the first time I went to church. The wind was blowing as we crossed the courtyard at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa in February. As we entered the foyer I recall the three young women that I was with brushing the bangs of their hair. I thought that maybe I was supposed to do the same thing. Perhaps Catholics cross their chests, and Protestants do the “hair thing.” When I leaned over and asked whether I was supposed to do the “hair thing” one of the ladies could barely keep from rolling in laughter.

As the service progressed, the music began. People would sing, stand, raise their hands, and close their eyes. I began to wonder, “What are they doing? What am I doing here?” Yet, I did not want to miss out. Essentially, I wanted to worship God, but I did not know how.

We learn to worship God, and that learning takes place in the heart, mind, soul and spirit.

One day I met an anthropologist, and asked, “Has there ever been a culture of atheists on the planet?” She told me, without a moment of hesitancy, “There has never been a culture of atheists.” God has created us with a desire to worship...a need to worship.

F.W. Robertson said, “Again, it is not a thing which a man can decide, whether he will be a worshipper or not, a worshipper he must be, the only question is what will he worship? Every man worships... is a born worshipper.”

The Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans worshipped multiple gods, their emperors, and kings. Our culture exalts self, our careers, our homes, our cars, our possessions, and our mates. We worship someone or something, either expressly or implied, by our devotion and allegiance. Yet lives remain spiritually barren. People are not fulfilled, and not satisfied.

Fruitful worship begins when we desire to place God in the first position in our lives. God desires to take barren wanderers, and teach and enable us to be fruitful worshippers. We cannot truly worship God until we learn how to worship. Similarly, we cannot give God His proper place in our lives until we apprehend the importance of worship.

The purpose of this book is to help us discover how to become more fruitful worshippers. As a framework for our study of worship we will consider the following:

Purpose
Person
Preparation
Power
Presence
Passion
Praise
Participation

This book is not about song arrangements, song selection, or technical training of musicians. This book explains how our lives can be transformed by an intimate relationship with God.

Chapter 1: Purpose

What is fruitful worship, and why should we worship? Fruitful worship is a life transformed by an intimate relationship with God. Worship is demonstrated in song, prayer, lifestyle, by individuals and an assembly, spontaneously and prearranged. Worship is the stirring by God's Spirit of our spirit, emotion and will. It is a response of the whole person to God. The evidence of fruitful worship is a life characterized by devotion and allegiance to God.

The English word worship is derived from the Old English word "worthship", a word reflecting the worthiness of one receiving honor and devotion. Fundamentally, worship is about God, and for God. Worship is what God desires, and what He is worthy of. Our motive is to please God and glorify Him.

What worship is not: it is not time to read the church bulletin; it is not entertainment; it is not extra time to get to church before the message. All professing Christians are not Christ-like; and all who go to church on Sunday morning are not fruitful worshippers. Worship should be done every day, all day long, and not only on Sunday morning.

The Bible shows us that worship takes place in heaven all the time [see, Nehemiah 9:6, Job 38:7, Revelation 4:8, 5:13, 7:9-12, 11:16, 15:3-4, 19:11-16]. We will spend eternity worshipping God. The **problem** is the absence of fruitful worship in the life of the Church today. A.W. Tozer described worship as, "The missing jewel of the evangelical church." **The solution is that people need to learn to worship.**

As we consider the **purpose** of worship we learn that worship is:

Required
Responsive

REQUIRED

There are over six hundred commandments in the Old Testament, but only ten were written with the very finger of God. Accordingly, they are deserving of special attention. Similarly, the first of these commandments is of special importance because of its place of priority. In the first of the Ten Commandments God tells us that worshipping Him is required.

Exodus 20:2-5

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

We must remember that these are the Ten Commandments, not the ten suggestions. In the first commandment, God tells us that we must place Him first before any other god. He begins to show us that worshiping Him is different from worshipping any other god. For example, worship of God does not involve a carved image or likeness. We do not worship God by falling down before a statue or idol.

How then should we express worship to God? What God requires us to do is to love Him in such a way that He is first in our lives. Consider the premier prayer of the Hebrews, the *sh'ma* beginning in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

The Hebrew word *sh'ma* is translated “hear”, and alerts us that what God is about to say requires our attention. We are told that we are to love God with all of our heart, soul and strength. This is the essence of what God requires in worship.

Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment in the law, and He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5:

Matthew 22:36-39

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus was teaching us that worship of God is required, and is characterized by love. Although love is related to obedience, we want to be careful not to reduce worship to merely obedience. Obedience can become a ritual or behavior. For example, we can go to church because we feel that we have to. We are willing to do the right behavior, and be obedient, but the desire to be with God is missing. Fruitful worship includes an attitude of love, adoration, and allegiance, as well as obedience.

He also shows us that a proper relationship with God must precede a proper relationship with other people. We cannot love others as we love ourselves until we first worship God. It is important to see that Jesus volunteered the response regarding the commandment to love our neighbor as we love ourselves when he was solely asked to identify the greatest commandment. We must understand that our relationship with others is intimately connected to our relationship with God. Furthermore, our love for others may be one way that we can evaluate our love for God. If we struggle to demonstrate love for others it likely reveals that we are not as close to God as we need to be.

The fact that worship is required is seen from God’s design of man. God has created us with a void to stir us to seek Him and find Him that we might worship Him. The Apostle Paul made this clear to the great Greek philosophers of his day as he addressed them at Athens:

Acts 17:26-29

*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so **that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us**; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. [Emphasis added]*

Many of us have gone through life trying to fill this void by searching in the wrong places. Like a man standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon trying to fill the canyon by kicking rocks into the gorge, the canyon is never full. We try to fill the void with career achievement, financial success, the bigger house, the new car, the best 'toys', drugs, alcohol, sex, relationships, etc. Yet, these objects of our attention, our allegiance, and our worship never satisfy. The hole remains unfilled until we learn to worship God.

We go through life with a thirst that only God can satisfy. The relationship between this unquenchable thirst and the satisfaction of worshipping God, is seen in the account of Jesus' interaction with a Samaritan woman at the well as recorded in **John 4**. Here, as we learn that worship is **required**, we see five essential principles about worship:

Seeking
Spirit
Sincere
Site
Sin

Seeking

Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the site of Jacob's well in her village. As Jesus asks her for a drink she is surprised that a Jew would ask for a drink from her since she is a Samaritan and a woman. Typically, the Jews avoided the whole area of Samaria, and would bypass the area on the way to Galilee. Furthermore a rabbi would not generally speak alone with a woman. Jesus explained that He needed to go through Samaria [v.4], and we learn that His purpose was to seek this woman. Jesus explains to her and to us that the Father is **seeking** true worshippers [see, verse 23]. How wonderful it is to know that God is seeking us to worship Him. He is in pursuit of us, because he is looking for worshippers.

I remember when our kids were small and we took them to a warehouse size toy store. We were looking at some items on a shelf, and when we looked down our oldest boy was gone. We started looking up and down the aisles, and our hearts started to

race. Soon we were running up and down the aisles looking for him. That's how God is seeking us...passionate pursuit.

Interestingly, when we found him, his first words were, "Where did you go?" Sometimes that is how we are with God. We leave our fellowship with Him, and then we ask, "Where did you go?" It is comforting to know that God is looking for me.

The Greek term *proskuneo*, that we translate worship, can be defined as a kiss toward one in a token of reverence. Our worship is a reverent kiss toward God. God desires that relationship, He requires that relationship, and He is seeking that relationship.

We need to honestly consider whether we are seeking Him? Do we desire to stay close with Him? Do we find ourselves easily lost and separated from our Father like a child in a toy store? Has it been difficult for us to find our way back to Him?

Spirit

Fruitful worship is a spiritual experience that cannot take place solely in our emotions or will. Jesus revealed this truth to the woman at the well:

John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Twice Jesus repeats this principle that worship must be in spirit and in truth. The Jews, unlike the Samaritans, had knowledge of God, but there was something missing in their worship. Fruitful worship must be inspired and directed by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God creates a desire to draw near to God in worship, and enables us to worship.

Later in John's Gospel, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as living water that will flow out of the hearts of those who believe in Him [John 7:38-39]. The flow of living water is necessary for worship. Similarly, the Apostle Paul explained to the church at Philippi that true believers worship God in the Spirit [Philippians 3:3].

A.W. Tozer remarked, "If God took His Holy Spirit out of this world, what the church is doing would go right on and nobody would know the difference." If the Holy Spirit was removed from our worship, and there were no notable difference, then we were not worshipping in spirit and in truth. Ideally, worship is distinctly spiritual, and not merely an emotional or intellectual experience.

We cannot truly worship God apart from the Spirit of God in our lives. A good litmus test to see if our worship is inspired by the Spirit is whether we are seeking to draw near to God. Imagine a car radio. Trying to hear the radio without an antenna is impossible. Similarly, trying to worship God without the Spirit is impossible.

In addition, you can have an antenna, but be tuned to the wrong frequency. Fruitful worship is spiritual in the sense that the antenna is up, and we are tuned to the right frequency. In other words, we have the Holy Spirit, and we are seeking to experience God. We need to consider fundamentally whether we have received Jesus

and the Holy Spirit in our lives. Next we need to consider whether we are tuned to the right frequency. Do we truly desire to hear from God? Is this desire truly evident in the decisions we make? For example, how we spend available time. How much time do we spend in prayer, reading the Bible, going to church, fellowship with other believers, and praising God? Similarly, how much time are we spending tuned to a known “wrong” frequency such as the wrong music, movies and merrymaking? As the Spirit directs our lives we seek more satisfaction in the things of God than the things of the world.

Sincerity

Fruitful worship is sincere. Jesus explained that true worship requires spirit and truth, not spirit or truth.

John 4:22-23

You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

The **first issue is that we need to know the truth about God**. Jesus told the woman that she worshipped what she did not know. The Samaritan people lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. After the death of King David’s son Solomon, the kingdom had divided. The Samaritans sought to establish a separate religion from the Jews in the south at Jerusalem. To accomplish their goal they had to alter or reject God’s express provisions for worship and replace them with a new prescription. The Hebrews then intermarried with non-Jews, and strayed even further from God’s truth.

We need the truth about God, and He has provided the Bible and His Spirit to guide us [John16:13]. Unfortunately, our culture is essentially biblically illiterate. Therefore it is difficult to know the truth, and difficult to worship.

Our tendency is to try to worship God on our terms rather than His. When we refuse to learn the truth, or refuse to obey the truth, it is rebellion, and not worship.

We can see this principle demonstrated in three examples of the Hebrews. First, the golden calf incident recorded in Exodus 32. The people became impatient while Moses had ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Covenant from God. The people waited less than forty days before they made a golden statue of a calf, and began to worship the idol. In this case, the people had yet to receive the Covenant, and sought to approach God as the Egyptians had. The **principle** is that if we don’t receive the Word of God we are likely to worship like the world.

The second example involves Israel’s first king, Saul, as recorded in 1Samuel13. Saul and the Hebrews were afraid of an imminent Philistine attack. In preparation for battle Saul offered a sacrifice to God. This appeared good, but as Saul knew, only the priests could offer sacrifices to God; not even a king could perform this function. Furthermore, Saul’s action was prompted by a lack of faith that Samuel would arrive on time to offer sacrifices as promised, and a lack of faith in doing it God’s way.

When Samuel arrived, he delivered the stinging correction as well as advising of the consequences. God was to take the kingdom from Saul and give the kingdom to David. Samuel explained to Saul that God was seeking a man after his own heart:

1 Samuel 13:14

But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.

The **principle** here is that sincere worship seeks after God's heart, and is demonstrated by obedience and faith.

The third example involved returning the Ark of God to Jerusalem. The Philistines had captured the Ark in battle. After many years King David sought to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. The Ark was a tangible reminder to the Hebrews of God's presence.

God's word prescribed the specific manner that the Ark was to be transported. The Levites were to carry the Ark utilizing special poles. But on this occasion, the Ark was placed upon a cart being pulled by oxen. When the oxen stumbled, Uzzah touched the Ark to make sure it did not fall. The Lord struck Uzzah dead, because he was not allowed to touch the Ark. David was angry and afraid because of God's Judgment of Uzzah. David likely wondered, "How could God be so harsh in judging Uzzah, and taking his life? Wasn't he just trying to help?" David needed to learn that God will not allow us to approach Him any way we want to, but He has established how we must worship Him.

David left the Ark at the house of Obed-Edom outside of Jerusalem. God then began to pour out blessings upon the house of Obed-Edom to stir David to jealousy. David then hungered to restore his relationship with God; so he retrieved the Ark in the prescribed manner, and worshiped God.

The **principle** of this story is that God wants to bless worshipers, but we must approach God according to His ways. To truly worship we need to know the truth about God.

The second issue is that we have to approach God without hypocrisy. God wants us to approach Him with sincere hearts. Our English word sincere is derived from the Latin expression "sin ceros" meaning without wax. The term was related to the sculpting trade. When a sculptor made an error in his work he could correct the defect with a mixture of wax and marble fragments. The work would look fine until heat exposed the imperfection. A work that was pure or sincere was identified as "sin ceros."

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for vain worship saying, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." [See, Mark7:7-8.] When we worship God as an assembly in song there are a variety of outward manifestations. Some will sing loudly, raise their hands to heaven, bend their knees, shed tears, or other expressions of worship. There is nothing wrong with these expressions as long as they are sincere. On the other hand, if the expressions don't match the heart, then it is not truly worship. Fruitful worship is sincere. Worshiping God with an insincere heart is as fruitless as worshiping a false god with a sincere motive.

Here, we want to ask ourselves whether we are involved in some form of systematic Bible study. This is essential to help us learn the truth about who God is, and how we are to worship Him. Once we begin to learn the truth, do we desire to do it God's way, or are we continuing to worship our way? Also, are our expressions of worship sincere, or are we seeking to impress people more than we are seeking to please God?

Site

The woman at the well was curious about the location where God's people were to worship:

John 4:20

Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.

Jesus' response shows that fruitful worship is not limited to a particular site. Jesus explains that the key is that we worship in spirit and in truth, not whether we are at Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim.

We can associate worship with a particular location. Perhaps we associate worship with being by a mountain, a lake, the ocean, or a stream running through the middle of the forest. Perhaps we associate worship with a particular church building. Perhaps we associate worship with a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There is nothing wrong with being inspired by a particular site to worship. The problem is when it is difficult to worship God when we are away from that site. Fruitful worship is not limited to a particular site, because God is everywhere.

We need to consider whether we are more focused on the God we worship or the place of worship. We need to be more impressed by the God we worship than the building we worship in. When our fellowship began we met in a shopping center. There were many people who struggled with the idea of church in a shopping center. They enjoyed the worship music, the teaching, and the children's ministry, but they could not worship in a retail center. As we built our new building, people would come in and say, "I can't wait for the new building so that I can come and worship with you." They would not come and worship until there was "a proper" church building. Although I certainly understand their difficulty, it clearly is less than an ideal situation.

We can easily focus on the site of worship rather than whom we worship. I remember as a young pastor when I was experiencing a particularly difficult time that I would want to go back to worship at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa and hear Pastor Chuck teach. Yet, I needed to learn to focus on God, and not my pastor or any place of worship. It is imperative that we learn to focus on God, and not the site of worship. Here, I want to consider whether I am more focused on God or the site.

Sin

Jesus also helped the woman to see that sin in her life was keeping her from becoming a fruitful worshipper.

John 4:16-18

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

Jesus gently exposed the fact that the woman was living with a man outside of the marriage relationship. When Jesus called the disciples, He met them exactly where they were at. As fisherman, He encouraged them that He would make them "fishers of men." Jesus approached the Samaritan woman at the well about the "living water." Apparently, this woman already knew how to be a fisher of men as she had been married five times and the man she was now living with was not her husband.

We can never truly worship God until we are ready to turn from our sin and receive God's forgiveness. Jesus exposed her sin to encourage her to turn from her ways, and to turn to God's ways.

For example, consider a couple that is living together outside of the marriage relationship. They come to church on Sundays, sing worship songs, and want God to bless their relationship. Nevertheless, we can't truly worship God when we are living in rebellion to God's express desire for our lives. God has made it abundantly clear that if we are not married then we can't "play house." Fruitful worship requires us to deal with the sin issue, and turn from our ways, and turn to His ways.

Here, we want to consider patterns of behavior or attitudes which reveal an element in our lifestyles that is contrary to God. We need to appreciate that it inhibits our ability to be a fruitful worshipper. Once we do that we need to come to Jesus and ask Him to help us to turn from those things and turn to Him.

In **summary**, we all have a thirst that can only be satisfied when we worship God. It is comforting to know that God is **seeking** us to worship Him. Our worship must be prompted by the **Spirit**, and must be **sincere**. Worship of God does not depend on a particular **site**, but merely focusing on Him. Finally, we must be willing to turn from **sin**, and turn to God. This is what is **required** in worship.

RESPONSIVE

We worship God in response to who He is, and what He has done. Religion is man's efforts and attempts to find God. By contrast, the Good News of Jesus is God's efforts to reach down to man. When we begin to understand who God is, and what He has done for us, we want to respond to God. Our worship is a reasonable response to God.

In the seventh chapter of the gospel of Luke, we see the account of a sinful woman who was forgiven. Jesus had come to dine at the home of a religious leader. The

woman was probably a prostitute, and she entered and approached Jesus. As she came to Jesus, she began to cry. As her tears fell on His feet, she washed them with her tears, and began to wipe His feet with her hair. She then kissed His feet and anointed his feet with fragrant oil.

The religious leader took the scene in, and concluded that if Jesus was really a prophet He would know what kind of woman this was and certainly would not have allowed her to touch Him. Jesus perceived the man's heart, and posed a parable about two men who had a debt. One man's debt was ten times more than the other man's. If both men were forgiven, which of them would love more? The religious leader correctly concluded that the one who is forgiven more will love more.

Jesus then drew a contrast between the woman who demonstrated her love and need for forgiveness, and the religious leader who was merely curious. Jesus showed us that those who are forgiven of much love much; and those who feel they are forgiven of little love little. Many commentators believe that the woman is Mary Magdalene, who is seen in the next chapter of Luke's gospel ministering to the Lord.

It would be reasonable for someone who begins to appreciate the extent of what God has done for them to want to respond to Him in worship. We need to consider whether our response to God is more like the response of the woman, or the religious leader? Are we responding to God with hearts that overflow with gratitude and love for God, because of the forgiveness that we have received?

Next, we see the early church, described in the book of Acts, and how they responded to God. Typically, they respond with acts of obedience and an attitude of dependence upon God. Consider the church at Antioch:

Acts 13:1-3

*Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they **ministered** to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. [Emphasis added.]*

We see the church at Antioch "ministered" to the Lord. The Greek term *leitourgeo*, refers to the priestly service rendered to the Lord. The term is also translated "worship" because of the relationship between worship and service.

What were they likely doing at the church at Antioch? The text tells us that there were prophets, teachers, and that they prayed and fasted. They were probably in prayer, fasting, hearing from God and speaking God's heart [prophecy], praising God in song, and teaching the Word. The church was using the gifts that God had given to serve the Lord.

Interestingly, we also see that God directed the church as the church was worshipping. We learn that the Holy Spirit spoke and separated Barnabas and Saul [the Apostle Paul] for their first missionary journey. As the Church seeks the Lord, He directs

His people. They responded with acts of obedience, and attitudes of dependence upon God as Barnabas and Saul were sent out.

God will work very naturally to direct His people supernaturally, when we seek to worship Him. Recently, I was asked to speak at a church that was approximately seventy-five miles from our home. I generally decline speaking opportunities, but I try to pray and seek God's direction. On this occasion, as I was praying, I felt that God was telling me to go. I called the pastor, and confirmed that I would go. One month later we were invited to attend another unrelated event on the same day, a few hours earlier, only five miles away. I was praising God, and just reflecting about how efficient God is. On the way, to the event I wanted to get a cup of coffee and go over my notes. Unfortunately, I turned off at the wrong freeway exit, one mile before I was supposed to. At the bottom of the off-ramp I turned and there was a coffeehouse. God was directing the whole time as I sought to worship Him! By simply seeking to respond to Him, God will lead and direct us.

Many times people don't feel directed, because they are not seeking God in worship. Meaning and direction in life are related to worshipping and serving God. We need to determine if we are using the gifts that God has given us. How are we serving God? How has God directed our lives as we have sought to worship? Are we responding with acts of obedience, and attitudes of dependence?

Consider the call to Israel to respond in worship to God's restoration:

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your judgments, he has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you with His love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

Restored Israel is encouraged to worship the LORD. They are told to sing, shout, be glad, and rejoice with all their heart. We want to focus on three reasons described by the prophet:

God's Deliverance
God's Presence
God's Example

God's people have been delivered from judgment and the enemy. We want to respond to His deliverance with worship. It is imperative that we remember that God has delivered us from judgment, because of what Christ has done for us. When we neglect this truth it impedes our worship.

God's people are also encouraged to worship because of the truth of God's presence. We are reminded that He is in the midst of His people. I think that many of us have had the experience where we were keenly aware that God was present. Perhaps it was at a church service, or perhaps a quiet place. I recently began to wonder how many

times God was present but I did not realize. When I am aware that God is present, I want to worship.

We are also encouraged to worship in response to God's example of worship. God rejoices over us with singing. We are responding to His leading, and God is the ultimate worship leader. When we are in tune with God's song we delight to respond in harmonious worship with Him. When we receive and appreciate the gladness and love that He has poured out upon us, we begin to hear that song in our heart...God rejoicing over us with singing.

As we search the Scriptures we see that frequently praise is expressed in response to God's work in **creation, deliverance, and redemption**. First, let us see the response of worship to *creation*:

Psalm 95:6

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

Revelation 4:11

You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.

Revelation 14:7

Saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

Here we see that mankind, the angelic host, and the living creatures around the throne of God praise God because He is our creator, and for His creation. In our culture, there is an attack against creation based primarily upon an argument for evolution. It is beyond the scope of this book to rebut the argument for evolution, and expose the lack of scientific support. Suffice it to say that it takes more faith to believe in evolution than it does to believe in creation.

Nevertheless, the attack against creation is an attack against worshipping the creator. The natural world around us shows design, and accordingly the work of a designer. Furthermore, the complexity of design, such as the human eye or brain, could not have occurred simply by random chance. It is mathematically impossible.

When we are in a place of natural beauty and wonder, and we consider our creator, we want to worship. Yet it is something that we learn to do. I remember when we first went to Yosemite National Park as a family. I was in awe of the beauty of the waterfalls and the familiar landmarks of El Capitan and Half Dome. The site of a grove of giant sequoia trees was remarkable and impressive. I remember wanting to draw my young children's attention to God's creation to stir them to worship, but they were not mature enough to appreciate the significance of the creation pointing us to the creator.

There have been many times when I have driven up the California coast and praised God for the beautiful scenery of the ocean and beaches that He created. Unfortunately, there have also been many times when I failed to appreciate the beauty of the creation, and to give praise to the creator. Nevertheless, as I'm maturing, I've

noticed that when I slow down enough to enjoy His creation, it makes me want to worship Him.

God is also praised as our *deliverer*:

Exodus 15:1-4

Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider he has thrown into the sea! The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; he is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him. The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea."

Here, God is praised for delivering the Hebrews from Egypt. Moses and the Children of Israel are stirred to sing praise as they recall God's miraculous delivery at the Red Sea.

II Kings 17:36

But the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, Him you shall worship, and to Him you shall offer sacrifice.

Here, the Children of Israel are exhorted to turn away from idols and to turn back to God, and worship Him because of His deliverance. When my father was in World War II, he sailed across the Atlantic on the Queen Mary. During the crossing a German U-boat (submarine) was observed, and all of the troops were summoned to the top deck to prepare to board lifeboats if necessary. My Dad explained that he prayed fervently that God would protect them and that no torpedo would be launched. God heard his prayer, and to everyone's surprise and relief there was no torpedo launched.

My Dad would later explain to me how that experience truly changed his life. From that day forward he was devoted to the God who delivered him.

On the other hand, I have seen people who have been delivered by God who were initially grateful to God, but the feeling soon slipped away. Essentially, when we are aware that we have been delivered by God we are likely to worship Him; and when we neglect His deliverance it negatively impacts our response of worship.

In addition, there is opposition from our culture to worshipping God as our deliverer. Our culture is likely to assert that God did not deliver, but it was just a coincidence. Imagine a person who is told that her diagnostic test results reveal a cancerous mass. The woman, her friends, and her family pray for God to deliver her. They return for surgical removal of the mass, and the doctors report that the mass is gone. The people who have been praying give thanks to God. On the other hand, those who don't believe argue that the doctors must have been mistaken about the initial test results, and there was never any mass. This is an example of the cultural opposition to worshipping God as deliverer.

In the New Testament, worship is frequently characterized by expressions of joy and thanksgiving for God's gracious *redemption* in Christ.

Luke 1:46-47

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

Luke 2:13-20

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."...Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, the angels, and the shepherds rejoice and praise God in anticipation of the redemption at the Cross of Calvary.

Luke 24:51-53

Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

At the end of Luke's Gospel the disciples witness the ascension of Jesus after His resurrection. The disciples are worshipping Jesus in light of the redemption that has already been accomplished, and was proven by the resurrection. As Jesus is carried into heaven they worship Him. We expect the disciples to worship as they witness this glorious event. But they continue to worship, because of their salvation.

Revelation 5:9

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation..."

Here we see the twenty-four elders as representatives of the Church, and the four living creatures who are present at God's throne, worshipping Jesus because of His redemptive work on the cross.

The awareness that we can be redeemed and reconciled to God, because of the work of Jesus at Calvary, is the essence of the gospel. We are sinners in need of a savior to redeem us. The Bible declares that our sin separates us from an all-holy God, and therefore the blood of Christ was shed to provide a means to redeem us to God if we accept God's gracious offer of salvation through Jesus.

In our culture there is an attack against absolute truth, and it is replaced with moral relativism. The mantra of our culture is, "If it doesn't hurt anyone else it's okay."

We have removed the concept of sin in our culture. Excessive drinking, and drug abuse are no longer sin; we characterize them as disease. Similarly, homosexuality is not a sin, it is an alternative lifestyle. In a culture where the concept of sin is being erased, our awareness of a need for redemption is attacked. When we appreciate Christ's redemption and recognize that we are now His, we want to worship Him.

It can be helpful for us to reflect, recall and respond to God's creation, deliverance and redemption. By stopping to recall and reflect we can be prepared to respond in worship. Sometimes recording our thoughts by writing in a journal, or writing a thank you card to God, can help us to make our recollection tangible, and help us to respond to God. Saying thanks to God for our redemption, and His deliverance, is in fact a response of worship. Admiring His creation and recording our impressions can help us to respond to Him. Accordingly, to become more fruitful worshippers it may be helpful to remember to: recall, reflect, and record so that we can respond.

PURPOSE STUDY GUIDE

1. What are some of the reasons why you believe we should worship God?
2. What do you think of when you consider the term "fruitful worship"?
3. What do you learn about worship from Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well? [John 4]
4. What do you think of when you consider the concept that we worship God in spirit and in truth?
5. What are some ways that we can demonstrate worship by our service to God?
6. Give examples of how your worship to God is responsive to what God has done in your life.
7. How can our culture be an obstacle to responding in worship to God's creation, deliverance, and redemption?

Chapter 1: Person

WHO GOD IS

Worship is all about the person of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, as A.W. Tozer remarked, “It is difficult to get people to attend meetings where God is the only attraction.” We need to remember that He is the “main thing.” We cannot have an intimate relationship with God unless we know who He is. God is infinite and we are finite. Therefore, we cannot know all there is to know about God. But as we learn about God, from the more than sufficient revelation of the Bible, we begin to appreciate why we worship Him.

The tendency in the church is to fail to recognize who God is. The Samaritan woman at the well was told that she worshipped what she did not know [see, John 4:22]. We worship because of who God is, not what we can get. It is imperative that we understand who God is so that we can draw close to God. As we draw close to God our lives are transformed and we can reflect qualities of God such as holiness, goodness, and kindness.

When I was in Junior High School, I spent a lot of time hanging out with my best friend. We started to influence each other so that soon we were wearing the same clothes, listening to the same music and going to the same places. That is how it should be with Jesus. As we hang out with Him, we start to reflect His attributes.

We admire great men and women of history because of what they have done, and who they are. Yet, they are merely imperfect people, despite the extent of achievement or character. But as we learn who God is we are stirred to worship Him more and more.

There is a problem in the church today that church services are failing to teach us about who God is. Much of what takes place in the church today draws our attention to men rather than to God. We focus our attention on the stage, video images of the worship team projected on a state-of-the-art screen, and sermons that fail to reveal who the God of the Bible is.

Pastors who are responsible to feed the flock and lead the flock have neglected their God-given duty. Instead they are trying to entertain the flock. The unfortunate result is that churches can't truly worship because they don't know the person of God.

In Psalm 115 we learn a key principle of the transforming influence of worship: **we become like what we worship.**

Psalm 115:3-8

*But our God is in heaven; he does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. **Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.** [Emphasis added.]*

The essence of the psalmist's warning is that idols are insensitive to the things of God, and similarly those who worship a false god are insensitive to the things of God. In other words, they are like what they worship. The same principle applies so that as we worship the true and living God we become like Him. Let us consider four important attributes of the person of God:

Holiness
Lovingkindness
Goodness
Greatness

First, let us consider the **holiness** of God:

Psalm 29:2

*Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of **holiness**. [Emphasis added.]*

Psalm 99:3,5,9

*Let them praise Your great and awesome name-- He is **holy**. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is **holy**. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His **holy** hill; for the LORD our God is **holy**. [Emphasis added.]*

The Lord is perfect and completely free from any moral evil. Holiness is an essential element of the Divine Nature. While the term holy may be applied to sanctification, or things set apart to God's service, the term primarily refers to God's nature. We worship God because He is holy. God is the only one who is holy all the time. Therefore, He is worthy of our worship.

Exodus 3:5

*Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is **holy** ground." [Emphasis added.]*

Moses was about to be commissioned to lead God's people, but he needed to learn important lessons about God. Moses saw the manifestation of God's glory as he approached a bush that burned with fire but was not consumed. Moses was instructed to remove his sandals as he stood on holy ground. By removing his sandals, Moses was affirming his obedience to God, and that God is indeed holy.

This is the first occurrence of the word holy in the Bible, and accordingly has significant importance. Moses learns that God is holy, and must be approached with reverence. When we worship God we must approach Him with a sense of reverence.

Certainly, we would expect a high degree of formality if we were meeting the President of the United States. Certainly we would show respect, and want to look our best, and be on our best behavior. God is more concerned that our hearts are right before Him than our clothing or our behavior per se. Nevertheless, our informality can lead to a lack of respect. I encourage our church that they can come to church casually

attired. I believe that you can come to church with jeans with holes. Desiring to worship a holy God will make you holy, it is not jeans with holes that make us holy or unholy. Similarly, I believe you can come to church with bare feet. God told Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. Apparently, God was not offended by Moses' bare feet. Nevertheless, the issue is whether someone comes to church casually dressed so that he can be comfortable in seeking God, or whether he just lacks respect for a holy God.

It has been said that "familiarity breeds contempt." In other words, when we spend more time with a person, and see his shortcomings, it breeds a lack of respect. But with God, the more familiar we are with Him the more we respect Him. The key is to remember that informality should not lead to irreverence.

In our culture, we often seek to worship God in an informal setting. There is nothing wrong with an informal setting, but it is essential to remember that although the setting may be informal, the God we worship is always holy. Accordingly, we want to approach God with respect. A.W. Tozer observed, "One cannot know the true grace of God who has not first known the true fear of God."

The fourth chapter of the book of Revelation provides a snapshot of what worship in heaven looks like:

Revelation 4:1-8

*After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "**Holy, holy, holy**, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" [Emphasis added.]*

First, recall the Apostle John received the Revelation while banished at the Island of Patmos. He was well advanced in years, and likely discouraged in his circumstances. He was probably concerned about the well being of his Christian brothers who were being persecuted. In this context John is shown a glimpse of heaven, and a picture of eternal things.

The first six verses show us that the first focus is God's throne. Forty-six times in the Book of Revelation we see the term throne. It is comforting for us to remember that God is on the throne, especially during difficult times. God's glorious appearance is

described as being like a diamond and ruby. John sees a rainbow around the throne. It seems that this heavenly rainbow was a full circle, distinct in shape and color from the half-circle rainbow that we see from our earthly perspective.

Even the rainbow would comfort John as a reminder of the covenant God made with Noah not to judge the earth by a flood ever again.

Worship is the second focus of the scene. The four living creatures constantly praise God declaring that He is holy. His holiness is repeated three times for emphasis. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament there is no exclamation point, italics, underline, or bold print to emphasize an idea. A repetition of three is the greatest emphasis that the Hebrew language can provide. Here, we get a glimpse of heaven, and worshipping a holy God.

As we learn that God is holy, we desire to be set apart to Him. As we desire to have an intimate relationship with Him, we begin to turn away from attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to His holiness. For example, when I came to know the Lord, one of the first areas that I saw change in was my language. I used to use profanity like some people use salt and pepper. Soon after receiving the Lord, He began to work in my heart on this issue. Interestingly, once my heart was changed, my tongue was changed. Then I noticed a change in the music I was listening to. As I was growing in Christ, I wanted to hear more praise music; and it no longer felt right to join in with Mick Jagger and the Stones and sing "Sympathy for the Devil." Essentially, my life was being transformed to reflect His holiness. There are many reasons to worship God, but He draws our attention to His holiness.

Next let us consider the **loving-kindness and goodness** of God. In Psalm 136 we are reminded to give thanks to the LORD for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. [Psalm 136:1] The psalmist declares twenty-six times that God's mercy endures forever. Why are we seeing the repeated declaration that God is good and merciful twenty-six times? Could it be that we need to be reminded for emphasis that God is good so that we can believe it when times don't seem to be good? Similarly, David reminds us in Psalm 138 that we worship God because of His loving kindness:

Psalm 138:2

*I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your **lovingkindness** and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name. [Emphasis added.]*

It is important to realize that God is good and loving, and that He always is. God is good because it is His nature. We must recognize that God is good and loving regardless of our perceived circumstances. If we fail to recognize this truth, it will be difficult to worship God when we are experiencing difficult times. When it feels that our world is falling apart around us, it is a confusing time. When there is so much going on around us that we don't understand, it is helpful to rely upon what we can know...that God is good and loving. The fruitful worshipper knows who his God is. Therefore, even in difficult times he worships because God is loving and good.

The goodness and loving-kindness of God is in contrast with many of the pagan gods. The gods of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans were often characterized as ruthless and capricious. The God of the Bible is repeatedly described as good, loving and kind. The Scriptures assure us that even in difficult times, God is using the circumstances to shape and mold us for our good.

We also worship the **greatness** of God. The Psalms repeatedly declare the greatness of God. It is significant to realize the greatness of God. When we start to appreciate the greatness of God we see that none of our problems are too big for Him.

Psalm 96:4

*For the LORD is **great** and greatly to be praised to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.*

Psalm 150:2

*Praise Him for His mighty act; praise Him according to His excellent **greatness**.*

Psalm 145:2-6

*Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. **Great** is the LORD, and **greatly** to be praised; and His **greatness** is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your **greatness**.
[Emphasis added Psalms 96,150, and 145.]*

Our perception of the greatness of God impacts our desire to praise Him. When we pray or when we praise, we are implicitly reflecting our perception of God's greatness. For example, we know that it is no more difficult for God to heal cancer than it is for God to heal a cold. Yet it tends to be a little more difficult to pray for healing of cancer than to pray for a cold to be healed, because we have some doubts about whether God will respond. Nevertheless, because we know God is great, we pray for healing of cancer. On the other hand, we are probably unlikely to pray for someone who had a limb amputated for God to restore the limb. When we consider the greatness of God, we realize that none of our problems are too big for Him. In His greatness He placed the stars and the planets in their places in the heavens, and He guides their courses. Yet He cares about my needs as an individual, and as His child. Certainly, a God who is great like this is worthy to be praised.

WHO WE ARE

We worship the person of God for who He is, but we also worship in the context of our individual personalities. Essentially, we consider worship in the context of:

Who God is
Who we are

First, let us consider the relationship issue. Worship is always personal. The Father seeks worshippers, not worship. God never separates worship from the worshipper. Worship is based on a relationship, not a ritual.

Abraham built simple altars to God, and called on the name of the LORD. [See, Genesis 12:8; 13:18]. God was more concerned with Abraham's desire to worship than a particular ritual. God did not require Abraham to build elaborate altars or engage in sacred ritual. The heart of worship is seen in a relationship with God. The essence of the worship relationship is seen in the fact that Abraham is referred to as God's friend [2Chronicles 20:7]. We have to pause, and ask ourselves how we would describe our relationship with God. Are we friends, or perhaps enemies? Is He like a father, and is Jesus like a brother; or do we feel like a second cousin twice removed who occasionally visits at the holidays? The foundational issue is always our relationship.

The second issue to consider is the "cloth issue." The key is always a personal desire to worship, but that desire is manifest in different personalities. Some are more demonstrative and they may seek to stand, kneel, weep, sing loudly, or raise their hands [see, 1Timothy 2:8, Psalm 134:2]. Others may be more reserved in their expression of worship. God allows us to worship in the cloth that we are cut from. Nevertheless, as God weaves the tapestry of our life, we frequently find that the cross-stitch changes the cloth that we are cut from, and our expression of worship changes. Therefore, it is helpful to consider how our expression of worship has changed through the seasons or years.

Third we consider the "vacuum issue." Worship does not occur in a vacuum. We are real people, with real emotions, seeking to worship a real God. The circumstances that we are experiencing impact our worship. Typically, it is much easier to praise God when you have just received a promotion than when you've just lost your job. In both instances we cry out to God, but in a completely different way.

As we read the Psalms we see the range of human emotion expressed. David radiates with rejoicing in one song, and declares his despair in the next. Worship leaders and worshippers are not freeze dried, and then brought to the church so we can add water and worship. I believe it is a blessing to see a full range of emotion expressed in worship. I love to be able to rejoice with those who are rejoicing, and weep with those who are weeping. I prefer worship to express a full range of emotions rather than a narrow "slice" that may not fully reflect the many emotions that worshippers are experiencing. It is good to worship God with the emotions that we are experiencing today. Accordingly, we see that our worship to God is impacted by who we are generally, as well as who we are at any particular time.

PERSON STUDY GUIDE

1. How would you distinguish worship music from secular music?
2. Describe some of the characteristics of God that you believe are worthy of worship.

3.How can knowledge of God impact worship?

4.How does knowing that God is loving and good impact our worship during difficult circumstances?

5. How does knowing God's holiness impact how we worship?

6.How can our perception of the greatness of God impact our worship?

7.How would you describe the cloth that you are cut from in regard to your worship style?

8.How has your style of worship changed through the years?

Chapter 3: Preparation

We often take for granted the need for preparation to worship. We come to church with a myriad of distractions. It is difficult sometimes to simply make it to church. Parents struggle to get the kids ready, and get themselves ready to walk out the door on time. They race to drive to church and race to find a parking space. Kids are then hurried into their classrooms. We come into the sanctuary, and the music is playing, but we are not ready to worship. Our hearts need to be prepared to worship. Have you ever wondered how long it takes to prepare a worshipper?

Not all worship is acceptable to God. In the fourth chapter of the book of Genesis we meet Cain and Abel. It appears that Cain was a farmer who brought an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel was a rancher who brought the firstborn of the flock to God. The LORD received Abel and his offering, but did not respect Cain and his offering. Why did God not receive Cain and his offering? Either it was the wrong offering, or the right offering with the wrong heart, or possibly the wrong offering with the wrong heart. As this incident occurs well before the Mosaic Law regarding sacrifice, we see that even apart from the provision of the law, not all worship is acceptable to God.

Perhaps it was the wrong offering, as the Mosaic system required the shedding of blood to provide a covering for sin; and the whole sacrificial system pointed to the ministry of Jesus. Since Abel offered an animal, and Cain offered produce, it might alert us that there was a problem with the offering. But, most likely it was the problem of the heart. Abel offered the firstborn of the flock, which shows that he was placing God in the place of priority, and giving God his best. God respected Abel and His offering, which shows that Abel offered with the right heart. For without faith it is impossible to please God [see, Hebrews 11:6].

Cain's heart was wrong, as shown by his response to God's correction. Cain was very angry and upset. God urged Cain that if he did well he would be accepted, but Cain refused, despite the urging and despite the warnings. And Cain continued to refuse God, and he acted out his anger and he killed his brother.

As we consider the need for preparation, God will reveal to us areas where we need to change to be prepared to worship. As we learn, how will we respond to God's correction? Will we receive the correction so that we can learn to be more fruitful worshippers? Will we refuse the correction and continue to try to worship our way even though our worship may not be acceptable to God?

Before we can experience fruitful worship there needs to be preparation of the worshipper. We will see this truth demonstrated in the life of David the shepherd, psalmist and king. As we examine the preparation of the worshipper we will consider the following principles of preparation:

Problem of Pride
Problem of Pressure
Pursuit of Purity
Price of Preparation

Problem of Pride

In Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 we see the fall of Satan (Lucifer) from his position as the worship leader of heaven [see also, Luke 10:18]. In the Isaiah passage we see the infamous five “I will’s” of Satan in his proud rebellion of God. Satan sought to exalt himself and receive worship and glory. Yet God will not share His glory with any created being. Therefore Satan’s position and privilege are removed.

Isaiah 14:12-15

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.

In the Ezekiel passage Satan is referred to as the King of Tyre. He is noted for his beauty and splendor. Satan is described as “the anointed cherub who covers,” and was likely the worship leader of heaven. Nevertheless the corrupting influence of Satan’s pride results in God’s casting Satan out of heaven.

Ezekiel 28:12-17

Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. "You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. "By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you...

One of the primary obstacles to worshipping God is pride. This is an obstacle for every worshipper, and can be a potential stumbling block for worship leaders. Before we can worship God we must confess our need for Him. Declaring our dependence upon God is repugnant to our flesh. We want to be self-sufficient, self-reliant, self-obsessed...proud. When we humble ourselves, and acknowledge our dependence upon

God, He lifts us up. On the other hand, Jesus also promised that whoever exalts himself will be humbled. [See, Matthew 23:12.]

Pride keeps us from seeing who we really are, especially compared to the glory of God. Our sin tends to look worse on other people. For example, we might accuse someone of being selfish, because they don't spend as much time thinking about us as we are spending thinking about ourselves. In other words our selfishness looks worse on them than how we see it on ourselves.

In 2 Samuel 12 we see that the prophet Nathan confronted King David about the king's adultery with Bathsheba, and the murder of her husband Uriah. Nathan told David a parable of a wealthy man who had an abundant flock and took the precious lamb of a poor man. David was outraged, and said, "As the LORD lives the man who has done this shall surely die!" Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" Imagine David's surprise as his sin was exposed after he had tried to hide his sin for a year. Imagine the expression of his face change from animated outrage to humble conviction.

It was difficult for David to see that God was speaking to him about his own sin. David was a man after God's own heart, and to his credit he received the prophet's correction, and humbled himself before God. Nevertheless, his pride was an obstacle to his perceiving that it was his own life that needed correction.

When Jesus gathered with the disciples in the Upper Room for the Last Supper, He told them that one of them would betray Him. The gospel writers record the response of the disciples. It is interesting that they did not all turn and point at Judas, and say, "It's Judas!" Instead they wondered of whom He spoke. Matthew tells us that they asked, "Lord, is it I?" This is such an important truth to see. An answer to the problem of pride is the humility that stirs us to ask, "Lord, is it I?" In other words, Lord, where am I getting in the way of worship; or where do I need to change?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urged us to remove the log from our own eye before we try to remove the splinter from our brother's eye. Interestingly, the log and the splinter are presumably the same material. The Master reminds us that we need to humbly deal with our own issues before we can assist others to deal with their issues. The "logectomy" requires humility, because we have to remove the log from our own eye. Others can urge us, like Nathan the prophet with David, but we have to remove the log ourselves. The willingness to humbly consider our own error and deal with it is an answer to the problem of pride.

The problem of pride can also be a stumbling block for many worship leaders. A worship leader must seek to humbly enter worship while leading others in worship. Ideally, the worship leader is effectively invisible so that all we see is the Lord. The difficulty arises as well-intentioned people compliment the worship leader. Now the worship leader must deal with the added temptation to take some of the glory or give all the praise to God.

There may be times when the Lord might use us more evidently if we did not secretly desire personal acclaim. He will not share His glory with another. Eifion Evans preserves a telling story from the mid-nineteenth century Welsh Revival. Following New Year's Day services, the preacher, David Morgan, was traveling home with an elderly

minister who said that, as he preached, “so near was the Revivalist to his God that his face shone like that of an angel.”

On the way home I dared not break the silence for miles. Towards midnight I ventured to say, “Didn’t we have blessed meetings Mr. Morgan?” “Yes”, he replied, and after a long pause, added, “The Lord would give us great things if only He could trust us.” “What do you mean”, I asked. “If He could trust us not to steal the glory for ourselves.” Then the midnight air rang with his cry at the top of his voice, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory.”

It is helpful to recall the Apostle Paul’s reminder to the Church at Corinth that the gifts they possessed were given by God. Therefore there was no room to boast. In other words, the gifts and abilities were given by God, so don’t try to take any of the glory:

1 Corinthians 4:7

For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Although it is only natural for a congregation to want to recognize a worship leader’s ability, it is supernatural for the worship leader to resist the temptation and give the glory to God. The famous composer Johann Sebastian Bach placed the letters SDG on his compositions to signify Soli Deo Gloria, to God alone be the glory. Bach’s desire to give all the glory to God is an answer to the problem of pride.

Problem of Pressure

The world exerts pressure to squeeze us into its own mold. There is no place in the world’s values to worship God. Fruitful worshippers overcome the pressure. There is peer pressure to conform to the world. This pressure is exerted in schools, the workplace and the family. It reminds me of the kids’ toy that pushes clay through several shapes. A ball of clay is pushed through a mould and becomes a cylinder, and then the cylinder is pushed through a square shape and is changed to a square. The world is constantly exerting pressure to conform us to the world’s values.

On the other hand, there is pier pressure. This is the ability of a pier to withstand the constant beating of the ocean against it and stand firm.

The Bible warns us against the problem of pressure:

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Paul makes his case in the first eleven chapters, and then concludes by urging us to respond. The essence of Paul's argument is that, in light of all God has done for us, it is reasonable for us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. The problem with a living sacrifice is that when the temperature on the altar rises, the tendency is to jump off. To resist the pressure to conform to the world requires a renewed mind. We are transformed by a renewed mind stirred by the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

As we learn God's word, and are strengthened by God's Spirit, we stand strong like that ocean pier. Despite the crash of waves we stand strong against the pressure. Similarly, as the pier rises above the ocean, the fruitful worshipper rises above the world, and stands out as a landmark. Our family lives near the southern California coast. As we take a drive along the coast, there are several piers that dot the horizon. Without doubt, our favorite is the Santa Monica Pier. There I spent many of my childhood summers. The same hand-carved merry-go-round horses are still there. The same arcade where I played skee-ball is still there. The same aromas of cotton candy, lemonade and hot dogs are still there. The same ocean and pier are still there. There is a big Ferris wheel, a roller coaster, and rides. There I recall many wonderful childhood memories that I experienced with my family as a boy, and I watch my children as a new generation of memories are born.

As we drive down the coast, there is the inevitable, "Are we there yet?" mantra coming from the back seat. Then as we continue down the Coast Highway the pier and its Ferris wheel become visible...rising above the horizon. That pier stood strong against the beating of the ocean when my dad was a boy, through my childhood, and will likely continue to stand as my boys grow. This is the type of pier pressure we need.

As we consider the life of David, we see the problem of peer pressure, and the threat to fruitful worship. As the ark of God was returned to Jerusalem, David danced with passionate worship before God. David removed his royal garments and was whirling and leaping before the LORD. When David returned to bless his household, his wife Michal rebuked David for his "unkingly" behavior. Here we see the pressure to conform to the world's expectation of a certain level of dignity and refinement that was in conflict with David's heartfelt desire to worship. David's response is classic, "It was before the LORD...therefore I will play music before the LORD. And I will become even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight." [See, 2 Samuel 6:14-22.]

David's response shows us the answer to the problem of peer pressure. David understood that worship "was before the LORD." The answer to peer pressure is that we worship before an audience of One. It is the Lord we worship, and to Him alone do our hearts and voices cry out. To Him alone do our hands reach out; and to Him alone do we dance or bow down. When we are truly seeking to please Him, we won't care what anyone else thinks as we worship. We can resist the peer pressure.

Pursuit of Purity

The pursuit of purity, and the preparation of a fruitful worshipper, requires three key elements:

Confession
Consecration
Continuation

First, confession of our impurity is required. The fruitful worshipper is prepared to worship as he desires to be set apart to God. Before we can seek purity, we need to become aware of our impurity. As soon as we see the holy God we realize our imperfection.

Once, when I was at a breakfast buffet, there was a beautiful fruit salad. There were slices of watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew, strawberries, pineapple and blueberries. The fruit salad was a beautiful masterpiece to behold. Right next to the fruit salad was an enormous dish of pork. There was ham, sausage links, and bacon. The thought crossed my mind how unattractive a big piece of pork fat would look in the midst of the gorgeous fruit salad.

It is much easier for me to imagine myself looking like the perfect fruit salad than to consider that there is a big piece of pork fat in the picture. Yet when I behold the perfect beauty of God, I become aware of my impurities.

As Peter realized that Jesus was not merely a Rabbi, but in fact was the Messiah, he expresses his awareness of his own impurity.

Luke 5:8

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Similarly, when the prophet Isaiah saw the vision of the Lord upon His throne, Isaiah was aware of his impurity. Isaiah's awareness of unclean lips was an admission of his impurity.

Isaiah 6:5

So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

The remedy for unclean lips is a changed heart, not more tooth brushing. In both instances God reaches out to Peter and Isaiah to restore and purify. The Lord is seeking hearts that are humble to realize that He is pure, and that compared to Him we are not. God wants the pursuit of purity because it means the pursuit of Him.

As we once again consider King David's life we see that he learned what God wants. When David realized his wrongdoing regarding the sin of adultery with Bathsheba, and the murder of her husband Uriah, he penned the fifty-first psalm:

Psalms 51:15-17

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart-- these, O God, You will not despise.

Once David confessed his wrong, the floodgates of his heart were opened and worship flowed out. What God wants is a heart that is humble before Him. A heart that confesses wrongdoing is a heart that will seek the pursuit of purity. The pursuit of purity is a threshold requirement for the preparation of fruitful worship.

The necessity of **confession, consecration, and continuation** are seen in the ministry of the Levites. The tribe of Levi served as worship leaders for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Why were the Levites selected to perform this sacred service? When Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the commandments of the Lord, the people became impatient and rebelled against God. The twelve tribes, including the Levites, made a golden statue of a calf and began to worship the idol. The Levites were just as guilty as all the other tribes.

The reason that the Levites were selected relates to their response when confronted with their impurity. When Moses descended Mount Sinai he challenged the people who were on the Lord's side to separate themselves. The Levites were the only ones who **confessed** their wrong, and zealously sought to pursue pure worship of God [Exodus 32:26-28]. Moses then instructed the Levites to "**consecrate** themselves." The priests were to be set apart to God.

The rituals related to the consecration of Old Testament priests are described in Exodus 29. The church is called a holy priesthood [1 Peter 2:5], and the ceremonies for the Old Testament priests relate to the spiritual position and experience of believers today.

First, the Levites were cleansed with water. A bronze laver was filled with water, and was positioned between the altar and the holy place. The priests were required to be cleansed before meeting God. Similarly, the Church has been cleansed by the Word of God [John 15:3, 17:7; Ephesians 5:26]. The priests were then clothed with special garments, and the Church is clothed in the righteousness of Christ [2 Corinthians 5:22; Isaiah 61:10]. The priests were then anointed with oil symbolizing the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us [1 John 2:27]. Blood from the sacrifices was placed on the right ear, the right thumb and the right big toe of the priest. This symbol served to remind the priest that he was set apart to hear God, serve God, and to walk in His ways. Similarly, a fruitful worshipper is aware that he is set apart or consecrated to hear God, serve God and to walk in His ways.

The Levites were privileged to lead music during worship, and to care for the Tabernacle and later the Temple. Their ministry was to help people worship God. Nevertheless, they lost sight of the need of **continuation** in the pursuit of purity.

During the ministry of Jesus He told the parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10]. Jesus sought to demonstrate that fruitful worship is characterized by doing good to others. The Samaritan that showed compassion to an injured traveler was seen in contrast to a priest and a Levite, both of whom avoided the need by passing on the other side of the road. Although the priests and Levites of Jesus' day continued to perform their tasks in the Temple, they had lost the pursuit of God. And with the failure to continue to pursue purity, they lost the desire to serve God by serving those in need.

The lack of continuation in the pursuit of purity was demonstrated in the absence of compassion for others, and a lack of passion for the things that God values.

John Wooden, the former UCLA basketball coach, and arguably the greatest coach in college basketball history commented, "It is what you learn after you know it all that counts the most." The need for continuation comes in conflict with the illusion that we have arrived. Therefore, to be prepared as a fruitful worshipper we need to pursue purity. And to pursue purity requires confession, consecration and continuation. Some of us are in hot pursuit, some are in neutral, some are in park, and some are in reverse. The key need is to be willing to honestly see where we are at.

Price of Preparation

Fruitful Worship comes with a price tag, the price of preparation. Warren Wiersbe asks, "Am I willing to pay the price in my own home and church so that I might have a worship experience that will please God, and accomplish His purpose in my life?"

King David came to appreciate the connection between fruitful worship and the price of preparation when he sought to establish an altar to worship God. David had been guilty of self-reliance in numbering the people to determine the strength of his army, rather than relying upon God. God judged the nation for David's census, and David confessed his wrong to God and sought to intercede for the people. God then restrained the judgment, and David was instructed to build an altar and worship.

1 Chronicles 21:18-25

Therefore, the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. So David went up at the word of Gad, which he had spoken in the name of the LORD. Now Ornan turned and saw the angel; and his four sons who were with him hid themselves, but Ornan continued threshing wheat. Then David came to Ornan, and Ornan looked and saw David. And he went out from the threshing floor, and bowed before David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, "Grant me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build an altar on it to the LORD. You shall grant it to me at the full price, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people." And Ornan said to David, "Take it to yourself, and let my lord the king do what is good in his eyes. Look, I also give you the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing implements for wood, and the wheat for the grain offering; I give it all." Then King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing." So David gave Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place.

King David comes to Ornan and requests to buy the threshing floor at full price. Ornan graciously offers to give the property to the king along with his livestock and wheat as a sacrificial offering, and the wooden implements for the fire. The threshing floor was a valuable piece of property near the top of Mount Moriah. There, the warm winds would rise up the mountain, and the grain would be tossed up into the air and the

winds would separate the chaff from the good grain. David declines the generous offer, and insists on paying full price.

At the end of the passage, David says, "I will not take what is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing." David understood that true worship involves sacrifice, and he was willing to pay the price. Saying yes to God often requires us to say no to our own desires... this is the price tag of preparation.

David's life reveals several shortcomings, but David is without doubt a fruitful worshipper. Remarkably, despite some horrific lapses, God consistently speaks of David in a favorable tone, because David was a man after God's own heart [1 Samuel 13:14]. A heart that is willing to pay the price of preparation will be abundantly fruitful for all to see. So David was recognized as the "sweet psalmist of Israel" [2 Samuel 23:1], and many of the psalms in the Book of Psalms were penned by David. They are psalms of rejoicing, psalms of lament, psalms of confession, and psalms of adoration. These are the expressions that can be described as the dividends of paying the price of preparation.

As David came to the threshing floor, he had merely been instructed to build an altar there. David had not been told that he needed to purchase the land. Yet, David desires to obtain the land and dedicate the property to God; and David desires to pay the price. David is not looking to make a sharp real estate investment, but he is investing in eternal things. The payment of the price of preparation will always pay tremendous dividends sometimes in ways that we don't anticipate.

Consider the significance of this threshing floor in the spiritual life of Israel. It was at the sight of the threshing floor that God restrained His punishment during David's lifetime. Furthermore, this site is located on the same ridge where Abraham ascended with Isaac to worship the Lord. There Abraham demonstrated the depth of his love for God [Genesis 22]. Abraham prepared to ascend that mountain with his son, and demonstrate his devotion to God even if it meant giving God his son. Yet Abraham's confidence and love for God are seen in his parting words to his servants,

Genesis 22:5

And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."

Abraham went to worship, and as previously noted, this is the first time that we see the term worship used in the Bible. God had promised descendants to Abraham through Isaac, and they had not yet been born. Abraham believed God's promise and was confident that he and Isaac would both return. Abraham realized that God did not want his son as much as he wanted Abraham's heart. Nevertheless, Abraham was prepared to pay the price to be a fruitful worshipper.

The threshing floor later became the location of the Temple [2 Chronicles 3:1], and became the center of worship of the Hebrew people. The ridge where the threshing floor was located would also later be the site where Jesus would be crucified. The principle is that David reaped tremendous dividends in ways that he could not have

foreseen. The moral of the story is that if we are willing to pay the price of preparation there will be an abundant harvest of fruitful worship.

We must ask ourselves are we willing to make sacrifices to worship God in regard to our time, talent and, treasure? It may be helpful to list or write in a journal the ways we have made sacrifices during the last year. Also, describe in what ways you would like to make sacrifices of your time, talent, and treasure in this year.

In **summary** we have considered the preparation of the worshipper. We examined the problem of pride, and our need for humility; the problem of pressure to conform to the world and the need to be transformed; the pursuit of purity requiring confession, consecration, and continuation; and finally the price of preparation. When you consider how long it does take to prepare to worship, the answer is a lifetime. But the key is to begin today.

PREPARATION STUDY GUIDE

1. How can pride negatively impact worship of God?
2. How can peer pressure inhibit worship of God?
3. Since we need to be set apart to God [consecrated], what do we need to be set apart from?
4. The price of preparation requires us to say no to our own desires, so that we can say yes to God. Describe some of the sacrifices we can make.
5. What are some of the dividends of paying the price of preparation?
6. Consider the example of someone who has paid the price of preparation, perhaps a person in the Bible, or someone you know. How has his experience impacted your life?
7. Describe a time in your life when you were in hot pursuit of God. How would you describe your life, and your feelings at that time?

Chapter 4: Presence

THE PREPARATION FOR ENTERING

Fruitful worship flows when we enter into the presence of Jesus. Nevertheless, it is difficult to transition from the distractions of the world to the presence of God.

Psalms 120 to 134 are designated as “the songs of ascent.” No matter where you are in Israel you always go up to Jerusalem. Although there are some locations in Israel with a higher altitude, Jerusalem is seen as a spiritual apex. Hebrew pilgrims would come from many different places, along many different paths to worship God. The Hebrew people were instructed to come to Jerusalem to observe the major feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles [see, e.g. Leviticus23:4-44; Deuteronomy16:1-16]. As they come to the Temple to observe the feasts, they desire to focus on God and worship, and lose sight of the things that distract.

Truly God is everywhere. But at the Temple people become especially aware of God’s presence. The Mishna, a collection of rabbinical interpretations of the Jewish religion, indicates that the fifteen songs of ascent were connected with the fifteen steps of the Temple where the Levites led the pilgrims in singing these songs. The people sang meaningful words to stir their hearts as they anticipated the presence of God.

A study of a portion of the songs helps us to identify some important themes to prepare to enter into the presence of God:

Restoration
Unity
Praise

First, let us consider the theme of **restoration** described in Psalm 126.

Psalm 126:1-6

When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad. Bring back our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

The theme of **restoration** is described as the people praise God for deliverance from the Babylonian captivity, to a future hope in the Promised Land. The restoration is like an unbelievable dream that is too good to be true. Similarly, a person who has been restored from captivity to sin, to the Promised Land of a life of hope in Christ, should be overwhelmed by the goodness of the restoration. We cannot enjoy the experience of the presence of God until there has been restoration between us and God through Jesus.

The **reaction** of their neighbors was praise to God, “The LORD has done great things for them.” A restored life is an undeniable testimony of the power and goodness of God. A restored life can be a magnet used by the Lord to draw people into His presence. When someone’s life is dramatically restored it attracts us to want to know more about God.

The response of the restored is noted in their **rejoicing**. They break forth with laughter and singing; and they are described as glad. Those who have been restored in their relationship with God have every reason to rejoice. They enter into God’s presence expecting a loving and comforting Father who desires to care for them. The Hebrews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon faced many hardships and difficulties, yet they responded with rejoicing. Similarly, despite our struggles we can rejoice, because our relationship with God has been restored and we can enter His presence.

The **request** of the restored is also described at the end of the psalm. They request that God will continue the work of restoration. They describe streams in the South. This is a picture of rains in the South that bring life to the desert, and is a metaphor for blessings. They are confident that despite their meager conditions God will bring forth a harvest as they continue to sow the seed. Similarly, God will continue His work in restoring us. Remember the encouraging promise of Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

After our relationship with God is restored we need to restore our relationships with other people if we are going to experience the presence of God. This is the theme of **unity** is described in Psalm 133.

Psalm 133:1-3

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing-- life forevermore.

The theme of unity is seen in the context of worshipping pilgrims who have come from different tribes, and different walks of life. They gather together for one reason: to worship the Lord at His Temple. Here they commemorate their journey as a nation and as individuals, from wanderers to worshippers.

The **reunion** is described as good and pleasant. The psalmist encourages us to “behold” or to take in and perceive just how good the unity of fellowship with others is. Restoration with God facilitates a reunion with God and unity with others. The corollary truth is that a lack of unity with others is indicative of a lack of union with God. The picture of believers coming together to worship, and seeing friends they have not seen for months, and embracing in reunion, is good and pleasant. The psalmist pictures brothers dwelling together in unity, and not merely a transient experience of unity. The reunion is the creation and development of deep bonds of unity that can withstand the tests of time, travel, and trials.

The **resource** of unity is pictured in the “precious oil.” Oil is used in the Scriptures as a picture of the work of the Holy Spirit. Unity is compared to the anointing of priests. The oil is seen flowing from the head, and down the beard, and flowing down to the bottom of the priestly garments. Here, an abundant resource is pictured. The unity of believers is constantly strained by our selfishness, jealousy, and tendency to walk in the flesh rather than in the Spirit.

It is not difficult to imagine a scenario where two shepherd friends meet in Jerusalem. They are anticipating an intimate encounter with God, and they embrace one another. They begin to share with one another the wonderful things that God has done in their lives since they last saw each other several months ago. One shepherd begins to tell the other how God has blessed his flock with seventy-five new sheep. The other shepherd tells his friend how happy he is for him. Yet secretly, the second shepherd is jealous since his flock only received twenty-five new sheep. Furthermore the second shepherd is wondering how God could bless the first shepherd since the first is such a hypocrite. Viola! The unity has been destroyed.

Yet, where the Holy Spirit flows there can be unity as the oil of the Spirit is the resource who lubricates the friction that can so easily arise in relationships.

The **refreshing** of unity is seen in the comparison to the dew of Hermon. Mount Hermon is near ten thousand feet in elevation. There the rain, snow, and dew create a lush green environment in contrast to arid Jerusalem. The blessings of full life flowing from unity of worship are like the dew of Mount Hermon descending upon Jerusalem. True unity in a worshipping community is refreshing and precious.

Just as unity helps facilitate worship, contention between brothers inhibits worship. Jesus addressed the problem of conflict negatively impacting worship in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:23-24

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Consider the context as Jesus teaches the Sermon on the Mount to these people from the Galilee region. The Hebrew people are instructed to travel to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate feasts of the Jewish calendar. People traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem would travel five days or more, likely on foot, and at great expense and hardship, to worship at Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Jesus is instructing them, and us, to go back home and be reconciled before seeking to worship.

Jesus is teaching us that our awareness of conflict with others inhibits our ability to focus on God. Therefore, we must first seek to resolve the conflict with others. Note that the Lord’s instruction compels us to seek to restore unity regardless of whether we feel that we are at fault or the other person is at fault. Jesus is far more concerned about us worshipping than winning arguments. Once we have sought to be reconciled then we can focus on worshipping God. The restoration and pursuit of unity is a theme to enter the presence of God. I must consider whether there is someone in my life that I

need to be reconciled with. Is there unresolved conflict that is preventing unity, distracting me, and impeding worship? If I want to experience His presence, I need to seek to initiate reconciliation, and establish unity.

The theme of **praise** is presented in the last of the Songs of Ascent, Psalm 134.

Psalm 134:1-3

Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who by night stand in the house of the LORD! Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. The LORD who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!

The psalmist notes the need to **lead**. The servants of the LORD are the priests and Levites who minister at the house of the LORD. They are reminded of their duty to lead the people in worship. Lead worshippers help us to praise God by their example. It can be uncomfortable at times for God's people to open their lips and praise God. Gifted worship leaders help us to praise God.

We have all experienced times of worship, whether at a church service, concert, or listening to a recording in the home or car, where we were stirred as we were led in worship. Anointed worship leaders are a blessing to the Body of Christ. They help us to praise God and enter into His presence.

I have been blessed to experience many lead worshippers at church, in a variety of musical styles, who were gifted by God to lead people to worship Him. Some were more talented musicians than other leaders, and some were more talented singers than others. Yet all gifted worship leaders brought me into the presence of God in a way that I was unlikely to arrive at if I had done it myself.

Many of us like to sing praises to God, and worship Him. Often times a song is in my head or my heart and I want to sing to God. But I usually find it easier to enter into God's presence during a church service when someone is leading me in worship.

The psalmist also notes the need to **lift**. God's people are encouraged to "lift up your hands in the sanctuary..." This is an expression of praise to God. God's people are to demonstrate their praise to God with their lips, hands, and whole being.

Some people tend to be more demonstrative than others. In addition cultural norms regarding a place of worship or the culture at large may inhibit or encourage our expressions. Nevertheless, the fruitful worshipper transcends the culture and worships before an audience of One. As we praise God we are moved to lift our hands, or demonstrate an expression of worship.

The Songs of Ascents end with a focus on the **LORD**, the object of worship. God's people are told to, "Bless the LORD." As we praise the LORD we acknowledge that He is the one who is worthy to be worshipped, and we want to enter His presence. The psalmist notes that blessings of God flow as we praise the Lord: "The LORD who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!" Here "you" is singular, meaning that individuals are being blessed among the assembly of believers. The blessings flow from Zion implying that although God is in heaven, He inhabits the praises of His people. God dwells where He is praised!

In summary, the Songs of Ascent show us important themes to help prepare us to enter the presence of God, including restoration, unity and praise.

THE PRESENCE EXPERIENCE

What should we expect when we enter the presence of the Lord? We will consider four aspects of the experience of entering the presence of God

Shekinah

Shine

Seek

Serve

Shekinah

Shekinah means dwelling, and is used to describe a visible manifestation of the presence of God. Jesus' ministry in restoring man to God is intended to help men to become aware of the presence of God in our lives. The Gospel of Matthew is framed from beginning to end with the promise of God's presence. At the birth of Jesus we are reminded of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 concerning the Messiah:

Matthew 1:23

*Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name "Immanuel," which is translated, "**God with us.**" [Emphasis added.]*

Jesus is called Immanuel meaning God with us. From the very birth of Jesus we are encouraged by the presence of God. Similarly, Jesus' last words recorded in the gospel of Matthew comfort and remind us of His presence:

Matthew 28:18-20

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am **with you always**, even to the end of the age." Amen. [Emphasis added.]*

Jesus promises He will be with us always, even to the end of the age. Jesus is speaking to the disciples after his death, burial, and resurrection. As He prepared the disciples in the Upper Room, shortly before His death, He promised to send the Holy Spirit to them. He assured them that the Holy Spirit would be with them as Jesus has been with them, only the Spirit shall also be *in* them [see, John 14:17]. Therefore, Jesus is promising the advantage to all believers of the indwelling presence of God.

The disciples had received a glimpse of the glory of Jesus, before His resurrection, while they were on the top of the top of a high mountain. The Mount of

Transfiguration account is described in Matthew 17:1-9. There we are told that Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. As they were there, God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

The disciples saw a glimpse of the shekinah glory of God, and they were in awe. After the resurrection of Jesus, both Peter and John refer to this incident in their letters [see, John 1:14; 2 Peter 1:16-19]. The presence of God's shekinah glory left a lasting impression on the apostles.

A question arises as to why Jesus allowed Peter, James, and John to behold His glory when He did not allow the other disciples the same opportunity. An argument could be made that these three were the "inner circle" who were the Lord's closest companions on earth. They were with Jesus when He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, and they were with Him in His final hours at Gethsemane. Perhaps they were allowed to see because of their intimate relationship with Jesus.

On the other hand, the argument could be made that Jesus realized how weak these three men were, and that they would need this encouragement to fulfill their ministries. In either case, we can be encouraged that God wants to reveal His glorious presence to us when we dwell closely with Him, or confess our need for Him.

The shekinah glory of God is an awesome experience to behold. Consider the manifestation of God's presence at the dedication of Solomon's Temple:

2 Chronicles 5:13-14

Indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying: "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever," that the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

The context of the account relates to the completion of Solomon's Temple. The ark of the covenant of the Lord has just been brought inside the Holy of Holies. A choir of priests was singing, and the musicians including 120 trumpeters were playing their instruments. The lead worshippers were as one unit praising God and giving thanks for His mercy and goodness. It is important to note that God was manifest when the people were as one. God delights to make Himself manifest when his people are in unity.

As God's people worshipped Him a cloud filled the temple. The cloud is a representation of the glory of the Lord. For example, as God's people were being led through the wilderness, God was present, manifest as a pillar of fire and cloud [see, Exodus 13:21-22]. Similarly, God was manifest to Moses in the fire of the burning bush. God spoke to Moses and made his glory manifest in the bush that burned, but was not consumed [Exodus 3:2]. The shekinah glory of God is often made manifest as fire or a cloud, as it was at the dedication of Solomon's Temple.

It is particularly important to see that when the glory of the Lord filled the house that the priests could not continue ministering. Even though the priests were involved in

a godly activity of ministering to the Lord and leading worship, their good activities were halted. The Lord's presence should be an awesome experience to behold. Here, the people of God were overwhelmed by the glory of God.

I have been blessed to occasionally behold the experience where God's presence was manifest and a worship leader was halted in the midst of leading worship. I have watched leaders overcome by emotion as they have entered God's presence, and tears flowed down their cheeks and worship was halted. When God's presence is manifest the worship experience changes.

As the dedication ceremonies continued, Solomon reminded the people of the history of their relationship with God, and then he prayed for God's people. As soon as Solomon finished praying the glory of God was once again manifest:

2 Chronicles 7:1-3

When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying: "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever."

Again, we see that God's people were overwhelmed, and in awe, as the presence of God was manifest in the shekinah glory. The people had been listening to the King's prayer of dedication, and the priests had been offering sacrifices. These activities are certainly good, but they can become rituals that lack an awareness of the presence of God. When God's people perceived the presence of the glory of God they bowed their faces in reverent respect to God, and spontaneously worshiped and praised God.

When G.F. Handel wrote the glorious "Hallelujah Chorus", he was deeply moved by God. Handel broke down in tears, and said, "I did think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God Himself." Too often in our church services we can be doing something good such as singing praise songs or praying without an awareness of the presence of the glory of God. As the sense of the presence of God is minimized, the tendency is for "good things" to become rituals. On the other hand, we see that when God's people become aware of the presence of God's glory they feel compelled to worship God. Worship remains fresh, and spontaneous in response to the awesome shekinah glory of God. We want to yearn for a fresh worship experience that is a spontaneous response to God's glory. When was the last time we experienced God's glory in worship such that we transcended our rituals and felt compelled to worship?

Shine

A person who has encountered God's presence is going to be changed. One way that we will be changed is that we will shine. Jesus told us that He was the light of the world:

John 8:12

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Jesus promised that if we follow Him, we will not walk in darkness, but we will have the light of life. The moon has no light of its own, but rather reflects the light of the sun. Similarly, we have no independent light source, but instead we reflect the light of the Son. Jesus encouraged us that this light would be manifest so that others would see the light shining in us. Furthermore, as people see the light manifest in our lives and good works, the Father is glorified.

Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Moses came in contact with the presence of God as He received the commandments at Sinai, and we see that Moses' face shone:

Exodus 34:29-35

*Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face **shone** while he talked with Him. So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded. And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face **shone**, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him. [Emphasis added.]*

Moses had an encounter with the presence of God that left an "afterglow." The meeting with God left Moses visibly altered. Moses face shone so brightly that the people were afraid, and Moses covered his face with a veil. Moses came into the presence of God, and the people saw the effect. Similarly, when we enter the presence of God we are going to shine. Note, the greater the revelation, the greater the transformation [see, 2 Corinthians 3:18].

When we read that Moses covered his face, it appears that this is simply in response to the fear the people expressed as they looked upon Moses. But Paul explains

that Moses covered his face so that people would not see the fading glory. [See, 2 Corinthians 3:13.] The application for us is the reminder that unless we dwell in the presence of the Lord the shine is likely to fade away.

We have a light fixture in our dining room that has several candle-like bulbs. Because the light fixture is hard to reach, and because there are several bulbs, we rarely change bulbs when the first bulb goes out. As a matter of fact we often wait for at least a few of the bulbs to go out before we go to the hassle of changing the bulbs. As the first couple of bulbs go out, we don't seem to notice that there is less light, but there is. More likely than not, visitors to our home may be more sensitive to the diminished light than we are. It seems that our eyes tend to adjust relatively rapidly to the level of light in the room.

In the same way, our spiritual life can be like that light fixture. When some of the shine has faded away, we might feel that it is not a noticeable amount of light. Frequently, we feel that there is no reason to exert the effort to change the bulbs. Also, others are more likely to notice the diminished light before we do. Finally, we tend to adjust our lifestyle to a darker environment until we finally make the effort to return to the presence of the Lord that we might shine bright once again.

Perhaps the most beautiful article in the holy place was the golden lampstand (menorah). The menorah was fashioned from one hundred twenty-five pounds of pure gold. In today's market the cost of the gold would be in excess of one-half million dollars. The lampstand was a reminder that where God dwells there is light. One of the duties of the priests was to insure that the wicks and oil were maintained so that the light would never dim. This is a picture of God's desire to shine in our lives.

Another way we can keep the Lord from shining through us is when there is something in our lives blocking the light. At our church there is a stained-glass window of a grapevine with a large cluster of grapes. During certain seasons of the year the sun shines through that window such that the green and purple reflection of the grapevine is projected on the opposing wall. I love seeing that image. I have learned that if I want to see the brilliant colors, I have to keep the windows clean. Similarly, in my spiritual life, if I want the light to shine I need to keep my life clean. We need to ask, "What in our lives needs to be cleaned today so that the light can shine brighter."

When we enter the presence of the Lord we can expect to **shine**. I want to consider how I am shining at this time in my life. Does the light look more like a penlight flashlight, or more like a floodlight at a movie premier?

Seek

A person who has entered the presence of the Lord should expect to want to continue to seek the Lord. As we consider the desire to seek the Lord's presence we will focus on three principles of seeking Him:

Remain
Return
Relative

The psalmist declares the cry of the fruitful worshipper to **remain** in the presence of God:

Psalm 27:4

*One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I **seek**: that I may **dwell** in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. [Emphasis added]*

Here David declares there is “one thing” he desires, and this speaks of a person who is focused. His desire for God is manifest in action, “that I will seek.” The one desire which is moving David is to dwell in God’s presence all of his days. David has experienced the presence of God, and he has known what it is like to be unaware of God’s presence. Someone who has been in the presence of God wants to remain there. David says he wants to dwell in God’s presence and behold God. David is not satisfied to visit...he wants to remain.

A worshipper who has been in God’s presence wants to remain in that place. A related principle is to **return** to the presence of God:

Psalm 84:1-2

How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

The context of this psalm is the cry of exiled Jews longing to return from Babylon to worship God at the temple in Jerusalem. The application to someone who has drifted from the presence of God is manifest. Here the fruitful worshipper is seen with a yearning to behold God’s presence. The worshipper who has experienced the splendor of God’s presence, and is then in a spiritual wasteland, will yearn to return to the presence of the Lord.

Consider the “Prodigal Son” described in Luke fifteen. In the parable, the son requests his portion of the inheritance during his father’s life, and then leaves the family. The son quickly wastes all of the money, and soon discovers that all of his new friends have left. The son is reduced to feeding pigs, and realizes that the swine are better fed than he is. Finally, in a moment of clarity, the son decides to humble himself and return to his father. The son is now able to see in contrast the goodness of the father compared to the futility of the world.

As the son returns, the father runs to greet the son and welcomes him back fully restored as part of the family. This is a picture of God the Father’s heart to welcome us back into our relationship with Him. Once we realize the splendor of God’s presence, and realize how empty life is apart from his presence, we are encouraged to return and seek Him.

A third principle relates to the **relative** attraction of God’s presence:

Psalm 84:10

For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

The psalmist declares the truth that one day in God's presence is better than a thousand days elsewhere. The psalmist identifies God as "my God." Someone who has been in the presence of God knows whom he worships. Once you have experienced the presence of God, than you are likely to say that relative to God, a 1000 days anywhere else, can't compare. We are not nearly as likely to say that about church regardless of how good church may be. We might pass on going to church to go to a football game, concert, ballet, or another activity. This assumes we are comparing the activity relative to church. But if we are comparing God's presence with any other activity, the person who has been in God's presence yearns to seek Him.

There is a certain amusement park in Southern California that tells us it is "the happiest place on earth." I'm not sure that I can agree with their assessment, unless you consider paying a small fortune to stand in long lines the epitome of bliss. But if I could bring fifty friends there for a private party, and we were the only ones there, and the whole day was free, that would be pretty special. Yet, compared to one day in God's presence...I would choose God.

Sometimes God is close to us and wants to make His presence felt, but we fail to realize His presence because we are not seeking Him. One night I was at church. I looked at the parking lot to see if my wife had arrived at the church, but I did not see her car so I went back to work in my office. This scene was repeated three times before I realized that my wife was at church. We had driven to the church together, and she had dropped me off and gone to run an errand. When she returned to the church she parked my car and went inside. I saw my car in the parking lot but thought nothing of it since my car is usually at the church when I am there. I was looking for her car but it was not there. Really, I should have been looking for her, not her car.

I had failed to look for my wife in the way that I should have looked. It dawned on me how many times I have failed to experience God because I had failed to seek Him.

Well, it happened that it was game seven of the World Series that night and I am a huge baseball fan. I was praying and thinking, "I don't want to miss the seventh game of the World Series for church, but I'll have no regrets if I miss baseball to hear God speak." It was just then that I heard God speak in that still small voice that He *had* just spoken to me about the parking lot and experiencing Him. As I consider that experience, I would rather be in God's presence than watch the World Series. I am learning that truly one day in God's presence is better than a thousand elsewhere.

Serve

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

In 739 B. C., King Uzziah died and the enemies of Israel were threatening to attack. King Uzziah ruled for fifty-two years and left a legacy as a good king. Under Uzziah's rule the nation prospered. But the king had unintentionally become an obstacle to seeing God. In their security and prosperity the people had begun to focus on Uzziah rather than the King of Kings.

After the death of Uzziah, Isaiah was able to see God. The first thing he saw was that God was still on the throne. It is comforting to realize that God is still on the throne, especially when our enemies are threatening us. The scene at the throne is noted as the seraphim loudly worship God praising His holiness.

Anyone who truly encounters the presence of the true and living God will be transformed. Isaiah became aware of God's holiness and his own uncleanness. And as Isaiah confessed his condition God took away his impurity. This would be a happy ending in and of itself, but it was only the beginning.

Isaiah was saved to serve. God inquired saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then Isaiah responded and said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah's experience of being in God's presence stirred him to serve the true and living God. Isaiah was commissioned to a fruitful ministry as a prophet of God.

Fruitful worshippers realize that they have been saved from something to something. We are not only saved from judgment, but we are saved from serving other things to serving God. We should expect to be moved to serve Him if we have entered into the presence of the Lord. If we are not serving God, we might not be experiencing His presence.

In **summary** we have seen that entering His presence requires preparation. We are prepared as we have restoration with God and unity with others and we begin to praise God. We have considered four aspects of the experience of entering the presence of God. The shekinah relates to God's glory being manifest. Shine relates to reflecting the glory of God. Finally, a person who experiences God's presence will continue to seek His presence, and want to serve Him.

PRESENCE STUDY GUIDE

1. Describe a time in your life when you experienced unity with other worshippers.

2. Why is the Holy Spirit needed to maintain unity?
3. How can unity of worshippers be refreshing?
4. How can contention, or a lack of unity, inhibit true worship?
5. How can serving God become a ritual that keeps us from perceiving God's presence?
6. How can the awareness of God's presence help keep worship fresh and spontaneous?
7. Describe a time in your life when you were shining brightly.
8. Describe at least three ways that the light can be diminished in our lives.

Chapter 5: Passion

TYPES

Fruitful worshippers are passionate about worship. Tom Kraeuter in his work "Worship is What?" observes, "There are two great passions in the universe: God's passion to be glorified and man's passion to be satisfied. However, these two do not need to be in conflict. They can come to simultaneous fulfillment in worship, because God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in Him alone."

The passionate worship of the fruitful is seen in contrast to those who are opposed to Christ, as well as those who are indifferent to Jesus. The attitudes of all people will generally fall into one of the following three types:

Wrath
Worship
Waste

The three attitudes are seen in the gospel of Matthew shortly before the Lord's death and crucifixion:

Matthew 26:1-5

Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that He said to His disciples, "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

The first five verses show us the attitude of **wrath** demonstrated by the religious leaders. In the first two verses Jesus predicted that on the Passover He would be delivered and crucified. This was Jesus' fourth prediction of the cross. The religious leaders hated Jesus, and sought to kill Him. They were jealous, and felt threatened [see, John 11:46-49].

There are many people in the world today who feel wrath toward Jesus, or towards His claims. Jesus threatens our lifestyle because His light reveals the darkness of a life opposed to God. Furthermore, He urges us to turn from those things and turn to God. In addition, the Lord's claims that there is only one true and living God, and that the only way to God is through His Son Jesus, are seen as intolerant. In a politically correct climate, a claim of objective truth and a moral absolute generates wrath.

In our culture there is an attitude of moral and spiritual relativity. People are encouraged to believe whatever they want to believe as long as no one is hurt by their beliefs. When someone suggests that there is moral or religious truth, they are frequently greeted with a wrathful assault that they are prejudiced or hateful. To the

contrary, if Jesus is who He claims to be, we demonstrate love, not hate or prejudice, when we tell someone the good news about Jesus.

Imagine that someone had been bitten by a poisonous snake, and I have the only true antidote to the venom. I went to offer the cure to the dying person, and all the other people there started to angrily say, "What makes you think that your antidote is so special? You are so proud and prejudiced to think that our cure doesn't work!" If I started to feel uncomfortable and intimidated, and put the cure back in my pocket and walked away, then I would not really be loving. The failure to offer the cure would demonstrate my lack of love by my apathy.

The claims of Jesus are supported by ample evidence that can be briefly summarized using the acronym MAPS. The evidence includes Manuscript, Archaeological, Prophetic, and Statistical. The evidence considered from an objective standpoint demonstrates that Jesus is who He claims to be beyond a reasonable doubt. The Christian faith is not a blind faith, but a reasoned faith. Therefore, since Jesus is the only way to the only true and living God, we need to offer this truth despite any response of wrath.

At the end of the passage the religious leaders express that they do not want to arrest Jesus at the Passover, because they fear uproar among the people. Yet Jesus is arrested and crucified on the Passover as predicted. Jesus had to be crucified on the Passover to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy. [See, Exodus chapter 12, cf. John 1:29.] Although the religious leaders do not want Jesus to be arrested during the feast, He is entirely in control. Ironically, the one being crucified is the one who is orchestrating the religious leaders' "Passover Plot." Jesus said no one could take His life, but that He voluntarily gave His life for us [see, John 10:18]. The fact that Jesus was in total control of the circumstances surrounding His death, and the fact that Jesus voluntarily gave His life for us, are two reasons why Jesus is worthy of worship despite the attitude of wrath.

The attitude of **worship** is seen in the response of Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha [Matthew 26:6-7]. As we see, *Mary is a model of passionate worship.*

And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the Leper a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table.

Simon the leper is probably the father of Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. It appears that Jesus had healed Simon of his leprosy. Had Simon not been healed, then Jesus would have been ceremonially defiled, and would not have been able to participate in the Passover feast. Simon opened his home and hosted this meal to show gratitude and hospitality to Jesus. Simon's home was a place of relief for Jesus among the trials of fickle crowds. Jesus especially sought relief in light of the coming betrayal and the imminent cross.

Matthew tells us that "a woman" came to Jesus. The Gospel of John identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha. John also tells us that the perfumed oil was from the nard plant of India. Matthew notes that the oil was very expensive. John notes that the perfumed oil was valued at 300 denarii. This is the

monetary equivalent of one year's salary for the typical worker, and helps us to appreciate Matthew's insight that the oil was "very costly." The oil was probably Mary's dowry to be used on her wedding day.

Matthew tells us that it was an alabaster flask, and Mark tells us that the flask was broken. The significance of this fact is that once the flask was broken the entire contents would be poured out. There was no holding back. It is a picture of the kind of worship that God desires...worship with all of the heart, mind, soul and strength [see, Deuteronomy 6: 4-6; Matthew 22:37]. This is a picture of **passionate** worship.

Mark and Matthew note the anointing of Jesus' head while John notes the anointing of his feet. The composite picture shows that the oil was poured from head to toe. We need to behold that passionate worship ministers to all of Jesus.

Mary is a great example of passionate worship. Although she doesn't dance, as David danced, she demonstrates a zealous love for Christ. Her love is frequently demonstrated by a passionate desire to sit at Jesus' feet, and dwell in the presence of the Master.

Luke tells us of a time that Jesus came to the home of Mary and Martha [see, Luke 10:38-42]. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard His words. But Martha was distracted with much serving. Martha wanted to demonstrate hospitality to the Lord, and undoubtedly wanted everything to be just right. Martha was passionate in her love for God, but had come to believe that doing for God was more important than being with Him.

When Martha became frustrated that her sister was apparently sitting on the job, she asked Jesus to correct her sister's supposed attitude problem. It should be noted that it is extremely difficult to be a Mary in a Martha world. Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." Jesus corrected Martha's skewed perspective regarding God's priorities. Jesus noted that one thing is needed, and that Mary chose that good part. Jesus teaches us that the apex of passionate worship is being in His presence and hearing Him.

John also tells us of another time when Jesus came to the home of Mary and Martha. It was in connection with the death of their brother Lazarus [see, John 11:21-32]. As Jesus approached their village Martha went out first to meet Him. Martha expressed her sorrow to the Lord and her despair that if He had only been there sooner her brother would not have died. Jesus sought to explain to Martha that He had authority over life and death. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."

Martha went and told her sister that Jesus was calling for her. As soon as Mary heard that Jesus was calling she arose quickly and came to Him. Note that passionate worshippers come quickly when they hear Jesus call. When Mary came to Jesus she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Again we see Mary at the feet of Jesus. This time Mary is crying in despair as her brother has died

Although Mary expressed confidence that if Jesus was there her brother would not have died, she failed to realize the fullness of who Jesus is...God in the flesh, the

Messiah. As Jesus saw Mary weep, He was troubled and groaned in the spirit, and He began to weep. The Jews who were there at the tomb of Lazarus presumed that Jesus was crying because of His love for Lazarus. But that does not appear to be the reason for Jesus' sorrow especially since He would momentarily raise Lazarus from the dead. It seems more likely that Jesus was grieved that even Mary, the passionate worshipper, failed to appreciate that Jesus had power over even death.

The next time we see Mary she is at the feet of Jesus once again. As we consider her anointing of Jesus for His burial, it is John who tells us that Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. Passionate worshippers delight to sit at the feet of Jesus where they enjoy the perspective of looking up to their Savior. Unfortunately the view is not frequently beheld.

The sculptor Walden created a sculpture of Jesus such that the observer could only see the face of Jesus if he was seated at the feet of Jesus. One could not observe the face of The Good Shepherd from a standing position. Mary shows us that frequently dwelling at the feet of Jesus is one of the keys to fruitful worship.

In considering Mary's anointing of Jesus in preparation for His burial we learn several keys to passionate worship:

1. **Ministers to Jesus:** In verse 10, Jesus observed that what Mary had done was a good work for Him. Passionate worship always seeks to minister to the Lord. In Acts 13:2 we see that the church at Antioch ministered to the Lord. Presumably, in context, it appears that they were worshipping God with prayer, prophetic words of exhortation and comfort, and fasting. And they were generally seeking to hear His word. As they sought to minister to God, He spoke and directed the ministry of the church. Passionate worship seeks to bless God, but results in blessing to the worshipper. Are we seeking to minister to Jesus? Do we come to church to give to Jesus, or do we come seeking to get from Jesus?
2. **Involves voluntary costly sacrifice:** Mary poured out the costly oil as a sacrifice to Jesus. She volunteered to worship Jesus without having to be compelled, because she loved her Lord. Similarly, we saw how David made a costly voluntary sacrifice to purchase the threshing floor of Araunah [2Samuel 24]. David was a passionate worshipper who understood that real worship involves sacrifice. Similarly, the Apostle Paul strongly urged us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. [See, Romans 12:1-2.] Paul argued that in light of all that God has done for us, it is only reasonable for us to sacrifice our desires to please God.
3. **Requires breaking:** Passionate worship involves breaking. Mary had to break the alabaster flask to pour out the costly oil. Similarly, the Holy Spirit that God imparts to believers cannot pour out until we humble ourselves and break before Him. When we confess where we have been wrong we are breaking before God, and we can passionately worship. In contrast, a person who will not see where he is wrong can never truly worship with passion. When was the last time we confessed our wrong to God, and asked for His forgiveness?
4. **Is extravagant:** As Mary poured out the costly oil she was extravagant in her worship. Passionate worshippers delight to be extravagant. King David displayed extravagant worship when the ark was being transported to Jerusalem. David

danced before the Lord with all his might. The Scriptures tell us that David was dancing in a linen ephod. Essentially, David was dancing in his undergarments [see, 2Samuel 6:14]. Oswald Chambers said, “The consequence of abandonment never enters our outlook, because our lives are so taken up with Him.”

Essentially, we forget what others think and seek to please God. Interestingly, the Hebrew word *hallal*, which leads to our word hallelujah, is frequently translated simply praise. Nevertheless, the term means to be clamorously foolish or mad before the Lord. When was the last time we just poured out our heart to God without thinking about what others were thinking?

5. **Gives our best:** Mary gave Jesus her very best. The costly oil was precious, and Mary was saving it for herself, probably for her wedding day. Fruitful worship gives God our best. The sacrificial system made provision that the offerings to God had to be without imperfection. It is not difficult to imagine a shepherd with two lambs, one lame and the other perfect. The natural temptation is to offer the imperfect one. The passionate worshipper desires to give God his best. William Barclay notes, “Love does not stop to work out how little it can respectably give. With a divine extravagance, love gives all it has and never counts the cost. Calculation is never any part of love.” In what ways are we giving God our best?
6. **Fills the house with fragrance:** John tells us that the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Not only did the perfumed oil provide the pleasant aroma, but it also removed unpleasant odors. Passionate worship fills the house with fragrance. It is a pleasing aroma to God, and it is also pleasant to other worshippers. The passionate worshipper also gives an example to clean the house of anything that offends.

In Nehemiah 13 we see how the storerooms of the Temple had been used by the pagan leaders as storage areas. Nehemiah threw out all the goods from the rooms and cleansed them. He then brought back into the storeroom the articles of the house of God. His passionate worship not only removed the offense, but was an example to the nation that helped to stir revival among the people. The revival to passionate worship fills God’s house with fragrance.

For example, you clean your car and remove any fast food bags. Yet there is still a lingering odor. It is not enough to simply remove the offending source, but we need to affirmatively add a pleasing aroma. In other words, it is not only stopping wrong behaviors and attitudes, but filling the house with the fragrance of fruitful worship. Here, we want to ask, “What offense do I need to remove? What pleasant aroma am I creating with my worship?”

We need to remember not to let the work that we are doing for Him interfere with the work that He is doing in us. Also, there is pressure from those who are opposed to Jesus (the attitude of wrath), and those who are indifferent to Jesus (the attitude of waste). We have considered the attitude of wrath displayed by the religious leaders, and the attitude of passionate worship demonstrated by Mary. Now we consider the attitude of **waste**.

Matthew 26:8-13

But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor." But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

Matthew tells us that it was the disciples who were indignant and asked, "Why this waste?" John tells us that it was Judas who protested. And Mark tells us that it was "some who were indignant." As we put the scene together, it appears that Judas objected, and then other disciples joined in the protest.

The complaint of waste sounds spiritual, but truly it evidenced a lack of passion to worship. John tells us that Judas was the "treasurer", and his motive was to steal funds. It appears that Judas was not a true believer, and accordingly could not truly worship.

There are still people today, both those who claim to be disciples and those outside of the church, who perceive worship as a waste. Sometimes people will take an apparent "spiritual high ground," but an argument that worship is waste reveals a heart that is lacking passion to worship. For example, the person who says, "I come to church to study the Bible, not to sing" or "I don't need music or to sing out loud to worship, because I sing in my heart," might sound "spiritual," but may reveal a heart that lacks a desire to worship with passion. Note: giving to God is never waste!

Worship is extremely important to Jesus. The Lord corrected the disciples for troubling Mary, and He was quick to defend her. Jesus was not intimating that the church should neglect the poor. But He was making it clear that worshipping God is the priority; all of our charitable deeds should be motivated by a desire to worship Him.

Unfortunately, the cry from Judas, that Mary's worship was waste, was contagious. Soon other disciples echoed in agreement. Fruitful worshippers are so passionate that their desire to worship is not quenched by the cry of "waste."

When David returned the ark to Jerusalem he danced before God with all of his might. We are told that King David was wearing only his undergarments. When David's wife Michal saw the King behave like this she despised him in her heart. When David entered his home Michal rebuked him for his display. Yet David indicated that he was playing to an audience of One. David said, "Therefore I will play music before the Lord. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight..."

David was passionate before God, and was not inhibited by his sense of dignity. Furthermore David refused to let his worship of God be quenched [see, 2 Samuel 6:16-20]. Similarly the Apostle Paul exhorted the church, "Do not quench the Spirit" [1 Thessalonians 5:19]. Fruitful worshippers remain passionate even in the face of others who "don't get it" and allege that worship is a waste.

Mary "got it" as seen by Jesus' remark that she had anointed His body in preparation for His burial. Jesus had just explained to the disciples that he would be

arrested and crucified in connection with the Passover. Mary understood, and responded to her Lord. Passionate worship is always responsive to the Lord.

Jesus said that Mary's act of worship would be remembered wherever the gospel was preached. It is interesting that God never said anything similar in regard to Abraham, Moses, David or Paul. Yet Mary's passionate worship is remembered to this day.

An interesting thought is to consider: where was Lazarus? Lazarus was raised from the dead and given life in a dramatic way by Jesus only shortly before the Passover. Perhaps Lazarus was not even at the home on this occasion. On the other hand, Lazarus may have been present at the dinner. If Lazarus wanted to sit at the Lord's feet as Mary had, it may have been difficult because of cultural customs.

Our culture can often clash with a desire to passionately worship God. We are often more concerned about what people might think than what God might think. We can let our culture inhibit our heartfelt passion to worship. Unfortunately the spirit of worship can be quenched. We want to make sure that we do not become complacent in our worship. A complacent worshipper is likely to fall [or to have fallen] into an attitude of waste rather than passionate fruitful worship.

TESTS

How do we know whether we are complacent or passionate? Three key concepts may help to guide us as tests:

Combustion
Consumption
Compulsion

First, let us consider the **combustion** test. In Luke's gospel we read of the encounter of two disciples who walked with Jesus shortly after His resurrection, but before the good news had become widely known [see, Luke 24:13-35]. The disciples were on the road to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem, when Jesus drew near. At first, they did not recognize Jesus because their eyes were restrained. As Jesus approached they were sharing with one another their despair, hopelessness, and sorrow. It was the third day after the cross, and they had not seen the resurrected Christ. The fire was out...there was no heat, no passion.

Jesus diagnoses the condition as heart trouble. He told them that they were slow in heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken. The Lord had frequently shown the disciples that the prophets had predicted that the Messiah must suffer before His glory. The two disciples on the road had focused only on the predicament, and had ignored the promises.

Jesus then began at Moses and the prophets and began to explain all the Scriptures concerning Himself. [This is one of many of Jesus' Bible studies that I wish I had a recording of.] As they continued on the road the two urged Jesus to stop and rest with them. As they prepared to eat, Jesus blessed the bread, and the disciples' eyes

were opened and they realized it was Jesus. Perhaps it was the way the Master prayed, or perhaps it was the nail prints that they now noticed.

Both disciples realized that their **hearts burned** as they heard Jesus teach and understood His words. They had spent all day walking slowly and went only a few miles. But with burning hearts they started to run back that very hour to tell everyone that Jesus was truly alive. Passionate worshippers are on fire for Jesus! Their hearts burn for Him, and they want to tell others about Him. They want to see other hearts on fire for Jesus.

A fire in the physical realm needs three elements for combustion: heat, oxygen, and fuel. Similarly, in the spiritual realm, the same three elements are required. Heat is represented by hearts that are willing to believe the promises of God. Jesus had noted that the disciples' problem was that they were slow in heart to believe. Their hearts had grown cold because they failed to believe what God had promised. If I focus on my circumstances, I'm likely to lose heart in difficult times. But when I focus on the promises rather than the predicament I can maintain a burning heart.

Oxygen is represented in the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as a fire needs oxygen to burn we need the Spirit to make our hearts alive to worship God. Worship that lacks the Spirit will soon be revealed as ritual rather than passionate worship. Just as a fire extinguisher and fireproof doors help to eliminate oxygen and stop fire, a quenched Spirit soon extinguishes the combustion. Therefore, we need to learn about the Holy Spirit, and unleash the Spirit in our lives.

Finally, a fire needs fuel. In the natural realm firefighters will remove potential fuel from a fire hazard to create a break. The absence of fuel allows the firefighters to gain control and extinguish the fire. In the spiritual dimension, fuel is supplied by the Word of God. If we are consistently in the Word there will be fuel to ignite our hearts. The disciples' hearts were "set afire" as Jesus expounded the Scriptures concerning Himself. The Bible provides fuel for combustion. The related truth is that if we are not consistently in the Word our hearts will grow cold.

From combustion we move to consider the **consumption** test. Passionate worship is demonstrated when zeal for God "eats us up."

John 2:13-18

*Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "**Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.**" [Emphasis added.]*

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry He came into the Temple area and saw that people were extorting worshippers. Jesus drove out those who were preventing worship by this extortion. Those who came to worship at the feasts paid a Temple tax in a

special currency, and they were being charged unfair exchange rates. Similarly, they came to offer sacrifices to God, but they were being charged unfair rates to purchase “approved” sacrifices.

Imagine the scene as Jesus made a whip of cords and drove the moneychangers and those who sold sacrifices out of the Temple court, and turned the tables over. Clearly there is passion in Jesus’ defense of the worshippers, and the house of God. The disciples remembered Psalm 69:9, “Zeal for your house has eaten me up.” Jesus was consumed by the things of God, and it was demonstrated in His passion.

I’m not suggesting that we go into our local Christian bookstore and turn over the displays if we think the prices are too high. But I have noticed that there is frequently more excitement over sporting events than for God. When our church was meeting in a shopping center there was a sports bar in the center. Occasionally on a Sunday morning during football season you could hear excited fans cheering after a play. I would typically challenge the congregation, “Are you going to let people be more excited about football than we are about Jesus?”

God’s people should be consumed with thoughts of God. We should be more zealous about the things of God than television, shopping, exercise or recreation. It’s not that any of those things are bad per se. But when someone can spend eight hours watching television, and then struggle to go to church for an hour and a half, he can’t really say that zeal for God is eating him up.

Charles Wesley wrote over six thousand praise songs or hymns in a period of approximately fifty years. As he approached the first anniversary of his faith he wrote, “O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise.” Wesley was not looking for a thousand people to praise God rather he wanted a thousand tongues of his own to praise God. This is a picture of consuming worship.

Psalm 42:1-2

*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. **My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.** [Emphasis added.]*

The psalmist draws a picture of his soul thirsting for God like a thirsty deer seeking water from a stream. This is an expression of someone who is consumed with God. Someone who is desperate for God is consumed with God.

I start almost every day with a cup of coffee. I make sure that I get up early to “get my fix.” Not only do I like the taste of coffee, but I don’t like the feel of a headache when I didn’t get my morning caffeine. Similarly, in my relationship with God, I want to “get my fix.” I like to wake up early and read my Bible [and have my coffee]. I like that quiet time with God. Furthermore I don’t like the negative consequences of failing to spend time with God. Although I’m not proud of being addicted to coffee/caffeine, I sure feel blessed to be addicted to God. Consuming worship is like an addiction...you “gotta have it.”

Psalm 63:1-6

O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.

David penned this psalm when he was in the wilderness of Judah, a place of desert. He says, "Early will I seek you," expressing his desire to start his day seeking God. David had sought and found God in the sanctuary, and would continue to seek God. David expressed his expectation of satisfaction in God, "My soul shall be satisfied." Like the Samaritan woman at the well, David had learned that only God can satisfy. David then declares that he is reflecting upon God at night in his bed.

David's life was consumed with God. He sought God in the morning and in the evening knowing that only God can satisfy. Perhaps David was consumed with God in part because of the adversity of his circumstances in the desert. Often in our culture we have a problem of too many distractions and too much comfort.

While on a mission trip in a barrio of Managua, Nicaragua, it dawned on me that the absence of distractions and the adversity of circumstances make Jesus particularly attractive. Conversely, the presence of distractions and comfortable circumstances make it difficult for us to be consumed with Christ.

I've been told that the average American spends almost four hours a day watching television. Since I know several people who watch almost no television, someone out there is picking up the slack. There is a tendency for television to distract us from God. It can be real helpful to say no to television, and say yes to God by reading the Bible, going to a mid-week study, or praying. Also, recreation and lessons can be a distraction. Family members involved in league sports or lessons can become an obstacle to finding time to spend with God and His people. The keys to planning our recreation are: moderation, balance, and priorities. If the things of God are not consuming us, we may need to reduce distractions and seek our comfort from God.

Finally, like Jesus cleansing the Temple, a heart that is consumed with God will be clearly evident to others. Do people that we know see us as people who are consumed with God?

So far we have seen the combustion and consumption tests, now we consider the **compulsion** test. Sometimes we are so moved in our lives that we are compelled to respond despite a natural desire to restrain ourselves. In my family we are three generations of Dodger fans. I was raised to dislike the Giants, the rivals of the Dodgers. I have relatives who would get in fights with Giant fans in the stands when the teams played in Brooklyn and New York. Yet I have seen home runs and spectacular catches by Willie Mays and Barry Bonds where I was compelled to stand and applaud. Although I was raised that you don't applaud anything that the Giants do, I found myself standing and applauding despite any restraint of my intellect.

Passionate worship often stirs us to “push the envelope” so that we are stretched beyond the restraint of our intellect. What do I mean by “push the envelope”? First, God’s Spirit does not compel us to act in a way that is out of control, indecent, or out of order. Accordingly, we are not going to start howling like a wolf, or barking like a dog, because those manifestations will not glorify Jesus. Remember, spirit- prompted worship will bring glory to Jesus [see, John16:14]. Also, there is no model in the Bible of behaviors such as roaring like a lion, or howling like a canine by believers as a picture of worship.

When I use the term “push the envelope” I am contemplating that the Spirit of God compels us to respond in a way that is consistent with the Bible, but inconsistent with some of our personal restraints. For example, some might be very uncomfortable singing out loud in church, because they feel that they don’t sing well and they are embarrassed of what others might think. We would say that they are restrained by their pride or ego such that they will not sing aloud to God in church. When the Holy Spirit touches them so that they feel compelled to sing, and do in fact sing out during church, there is a passion to worship.

Consider someone who is touched by God during a church service, and wants to cry. The natural tendency is to restrain the tears and hold them back. He is concerned with what others will think. Yet when he is overwhelmed by the compulsion to respond to God, and the tears come out, there is passionate worship.

Let us consider some of the several pictures of ways that we might be stirred to passionate worship described in the Bible.

1Timothy 2:8

*I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, **lifting up holy hands**, without wrath and doubting; [emphasis added].*

Here, the Apostle Paul instructs Timothy that he desires people to lift up their hands to God. It is a picture of reaching up to God who has already reached down to us.

Psalms 134:2

Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word “yadah” meaning to revere by stretching out one’s hands is frequently translated “praise.” When we feel compelled to express our worship to God by lifting up our hands, even though naturally we would be inhibited to do so, there is passionate worship.

Psalms 95:6

*Oh come, let us worship and **bow down**; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker [emphasis added].*

The Hebrew word “barak” can be translated to kneel and bless God as an act of adoration. Sometimes a person feels compelled to worship by getting on his knees in a

position of humble adoration of God. Some people might not normally think of worshipping that way. Yet they might feel prompted to respond to God, and find themselves kneeling in worship to God despite their natural hesitation. Again, a picture of passionate worship and the compulsion test.

Psalm47:1

*Oh, **clap your hands**, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! [Emphasis added.]*

Psalm149:3

*Let them praise His name with the **dance**; Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp. [Emphasis added.]*

Psalm 30:11

*You have turned for me my mourning into **dancing**, You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness [emphasis added].*

The Bible tells us that we get to worship God by using our whole body to worship Him. Sometimes we feel prompted to clap our hands during a song either in using our hands as instruments in keeping time with the music [ideally with the whole congregation on the same beat], or we want to applaud and give praise to God. Putting our hands together is one way that we can use our body to worship God. For some people it is unnatural to clap, but when they are moved to do so by God's Spirit there is passionate worship.

Another way that we can use our body to worship God is in dance. Expressing praise to God in dance can be a beautiful expression of worship. Some churches have a dance worship team that expresses worship in dance to the congregation. Some congregations encourage the whole assembly to participate. Yet many of us would tend to be very uncomfortable with the idea of dancing before others. But if God stirs us to dance, as David danced before the ark of God, we have been compelled to passionate worship.

In **summary**, we have seen that there are three types of attitudes toward passion for God: **wrath, worship, and waste**. Do we desire to passionately worship God, or do we believe that it is a waste? We have also seen three tests to know if we are passionate worshippers. First, **combustion**: are we burning up for God? Second, **consumption**: do the things of God consume us as a zealous passion? Third, **compulsion**: does our passion to worship compel us to respond to God in ways beyond our natural inhibitions?

PASSION STUDY GUIDE

1. How can worship help fulfill my desire to be satisfied, and God's desire to be glorified?

2. Describe some of the ways that an attitude of “wrath” towards Jesus is seen in your culture?
3. Describe someone in your life who you consider to be a passionate worshipper. How does their example impact your worship experience?
4. What was the most significant lesson you learned about worship from Mary’s example of passionate worship?
5. How can the attitude of “waste” be contagious and quench worship?
6. Describe a time in your life when your heart was burning in passionate worship.
7. How would you describe being consumed with passion for God?

Chapter 6: Power

DILEMMA

A dilemma can be defined as a perplexing or awkward situation; a situation necessitating a choice between awkward alternatives. Today in our culture we see the dilemma that more people express a desire and interest for spiritual things, yet there is an apparent decline in godliness. The answer to the riddle is addressed by the Apostle Paul in his last letter to the church, 2 Timothy.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, a young pastor, he warned that in the days before Jesus' return there would be troubled times and troubled people. Paul explained that one of the characteristics of the times would be that people would have a form of godliness but deny its power [see, 2 Timothy 3:5]. In other words, there would be "spiritual people" believing in many different philosophies, as well as professing Christians, who lack the power for godliness.

The power for godliness is made available to us through the Holy Spirit of God. Without the Spirit there is nothing pleasing to God and there is no power. The power of God is manifest in worship by the Spirit of God. The power is made available to please God, defeat the enemy, and deliver God's people.

In places of worship throughout the world today there are worshippers with power, and there are unfortunately people with a form of godliness but lacking the power. Similarly, in churches throughout the world today there are congregations of people who worship God in power and some that lack the power. People can come to church and sing songs during a church worship service, but never experience the power of God in worship.

This is the dilemma: the absence of the manifestation of the power of God in the experience of the church, and in the lives of individual believers. First, we must recognize the problem or dilemma, and then we can learn the solution of appropriating the power in our lives as fruitful worshippers.

Preliminarily, we must remember that when we ask Christ into our lives we are forgiven of our sin, and we receive the Spirit of God in our lives. This is what is meant to be born again [see, John 3]. Accordingly, to experience and appropriate the power of God it is fundamental that we have received Jesus and the Spirit into our lives. Yet even when we have received the Spirit, we can ignore the prompting and strength of the Spirit.

Often people go through the motions of going to church and singing, but in effect they are "playing church." Instead of appropriating the power of God they are willing to accept a counterfeit.

On the other hand, when the power of God is manifest, there is an awareness of entering the presence of God, and lives are changed. The resulting fruit is Christ-like character, or godliness [see, Galatians 5:22-23].

Paul warned Timothy that the people who had a form of godliness, but denied its power, resisted or opposed the truth as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses. Who are

Jannes and Jambres, and how did they resist Moses? And what does their opposition have to do with the power of God and worship?

Jannes and Jambres are presumed to be magicians of Pharaoh's court at the time of the Exodus. In Exodus 5:1 we read that Moses and his brother Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" Note that God wanted His people to be free to worship Him.

Pharaoh solicited his magicians to oppose God, and keep the Hebrews in bondage. As Moses and Aaron spoke to Pharaoh, Aaron threw down his rod and it turned into a serpent. When Pharaoh's magicians appeared to demonstrate equal power and their rods turned into serpents, Aaron's rod swallowed up the magicians' rods.

Then the power of God was manifest as the plagues were visited upon Egypt. As the plagues of blood and frogs were manifest, Pharaoh's magicians seemed to duplicate this power. But when the plague of lice and the remaining plagues were poured out, the magicians were unable to demonstrate/ imitate the power. God's power was manifest, the enemy was defeated, and God's people were delivered and set free to worship Him.

How did the magicians seem to duplicate the power of God? Either they were simply "magicians' tricks" or they were displaying "demonic power." In either scenario, **the key principle is that the opposition to the power of God was to produce a counterfeit or imitation of the power of God.** The enemy of men's souls continues to oppose worship of God by offering a counterfeit or imitation that appears to be real but lacks the power of God.

Nevertheless, in the Exodus God's power was manifest and ultimately was clearly distinguishable from the imitation. Similarly, Paul encouraged Timothy that as the magicians' imitation was exposed, so too the form of godliness that lacked the true power of God would be manifest [2Timothy3:1-9].

Paul also wrote to the Galatians and expressed his concern about their efforts to live a godly life in their own strength; and worship apart from the work of the Spirit.

Galatians 3:1-5

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain — if indeed it was in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

The Galatians had received the good news of Jesus in faith, and had received God's Spirit. Paul reminds them that miracles were evident among them in the demonstration of the power of the Spirit. God had performed these miraculous works to demonstrate the power of the Spirit, and bless the believers in Galatia, simply because

they had believed. They did not have to perform any work for the power of the Spirit to be made manifest.

After Paul had left the region, men came to the church and persuaded the believers that if they really wanted to be saved they had to follow the Mosaic Law as well as believing in Christ. This argument appeals to our flesh, because it asserts that we can please God by our own efforts [e.g. following the Mosaic Law]. Unfortunately it also encourages people to try to worship God apart from the Spirit of God.

Paul passionately explains that the apex of worship is the power of the Spirit, not the works of men. He asks, “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” Trying to perfect or complete worship by the works of men is a step backwards from the work of the Spirit.

The pinnacle of worship is the unleashing of the power of God’s Spirit in the lives of people to transform wanderers to worshippers, to establish godliness or Christ-like character. Yet in the Church today we frequently try to “improve” upon the anointing of the Spirit by the machinery of the church, and we replace the power with performance. Nevertheless, despite the creation of a well-oiled machine, the oil of the anointing of the Spirit is absent, and godliness is missing.

At Christmas one year, when our kids were young, they received some battery operated walkie-talkies. The oldest opened the battery door and placed the battery inside. He could not understand why the walkie-talkies were not working. When I opened the battery compartment I saw the batteries were placed inside the compartment, but they were not connected. Although they looked great, there was no power. Furthermore, although you could speak, you could not hear. This is the problem when the power of God is replaced with methods. It may look nice, but the power is missing, and we don’t hear from God. We need to connect with Him and receive His power.

Certainly, if the Apostle Paul was present in many churches today he would ask us, “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” We have fashioned church worship services to present to consumer congregations a product that will appeal to their senses rather than their spirit.

In the Old Testament, priests were anointed with oil as they were commissioned for service. The oil is a picture of the work of the Holy Spirit. The priests were responsible to lead the people in worship. Essentially, we see that the Spirit is what is necessary to be led into worship. Today in the Church, God still anoints lead worshippers with His Spirit. We want to be careful that we don’t replace the anointing with methodology. The danger is that we may end up worshipping the methodology rather than God.

What is the anointing to lead worship? Essentially, it is the calling and equipping by God to demonstrate His power to usher people into His presence. Anointing is not performance. It does not seek to entertain. Anointing does not seek an audience and say, “see me,” but worships primarily before an audience of One and tells others present, “see Him.”

Anointing is not necessarily musical ability. We see many gifted musicians who have been anointed to lead worship. Yet I have seen some worship leaders who were

not the most talented musically, but were clearly anointed so that people saw the power of God manifest. People were moved to worship by the demonstration of God's power displayed in those worship leaders. When asked whether I would rather have a talented musician who was not anointed to lead worship, or a person leading worship who is anointed, but has very limited musical ability, I recognize the dilemma. My response is that I want someone who is anointed, loves God and is gifted musically to lead worship. Nevertheless, if forced to choose, I want to select those with a love for God and an anointing even if they have less musical ability.

If we put people in front of a congregation who can sing or play an instrument, but don't have a love for God, how can we expect to see the power of God displayed? I'm not advocating that we look for bad singers and musicians to lead worship in order to demonstrate the power of God. But I'm saying that the power of God is displayed through a worship leader who is anointed by God, whether he is extremely talented as a musician or vocalist or not.

Also, we must see that anointing is not emotion per se. True worship involves an emotional response, but the emotions have to be stirred by God's Spirit, not merely stirred by man's effort. As the Hebrew people worshipped a golden calf there was plenty of emotion. Joshua, Moses' assistant, thought it was the sound of war in the camp [Exodus 32:18-19]. There was plenty of emotion; it was in the context of religion; but it was not the power of God. Anointing is not "cheerleading." When the anointing is present, the power of God touches hearts and produces change. The result is the fruit of the Spirit or godliness.

Now that we have considered the dilemma or problem, we can begin to consider the power that is available. Once we begin to understand the power that is available, we can begin to appropriate the power.

DEFEAT

The power of God is demonstrated in worship to defeat the enemies of God and His people. As we consider the experience of the Hebrew people described in the Old Testament we see that the twelve tribes of Israel gather together for only two reasons: worship and warfare. In both scenarios the power of God is demonstrated as the enemy is defeated.

In the Book of Joshua we see the account of the Hebrews receiving the Promised Land. As the Hebrews cross the Jordan River they begin to inhabit the Promised Land. Unfortunately, a great obstacle exists on the horizon, the walled-city of Jericho. Nevertheless, God promised that He had given victory over Jericho.

God delivers the battle plan to Joshua. The Hebrews shall march around the city one time per day for six days. The priests shall march before the ark, and bear seven trumpets of rams' horns. The army shall come before and behind the priests. On the seventh day the priests and the army shall march around the city seven times, and then the priests shall blow the trumpets. After the long blast, when the army hears the trumpet all will shout with a great shout.

From a military standpoint this is not the most impressive battle plan, and from a human perspective it appears doomed for failure. Try to imagine the expressions on the faces of the generals as Joshua delivers the battle plan to his leaders. They probably wonder whether Joshua really heard from God. They probably doubt that the plan could be successful; they probably think that the plan lacks military power; and they probably feel that they would look foolish implementing the plan. Nevertheless, they ultimately agree to step out according to the instruction from the Lord.

Why did God give this battle plan to Joshua? Remember that the people who just crossed the Jordan River were a new generation. The former generation that had doubted the power of God to deliver the Promised Land had died out in the wilderness. Now a new generation has entered the Promised Land, and God will begin a new work to demonstrate His power. Surely, God could have merely spoken a word and brought the walls of Jericho down. Or God could have used the elements such as a tornado or fire to deliver the city. But instead God presented a plan where the Hebrews must step out trusting God to deliver, and then God shall deliver.

The principle of stepping out in faith in God was seen as this generation crossed the Jordan River. God told the priests, who were the lead worshippers, that as soon as they stepped into the Jordan God would stop the waters of the river. But the priests had to step out in confidence, and then the power of God was manifest. This is in contrast to the Red Sea scene where God parted the water without the people's having to step out into the sea.

In the Promised Land, God has a new generation that has seen the power of God manifest, and is willing to step out in confidence to see God defeat the enemy, and see His power manifest once more. Note that the battle plan requires God's people to demonstrate their trust in His power. Oswald Chambers once remarked, "Complete weakness and dependence will always be the occasion for the Spirit of God to manifest His power."

The **first lesson** to learn is that God's power is manifest where God's people demonstrate an attitude of dependence upon Him. The battle plan was clearly ridiculous from a military perspective. The plan tests their hearts for seven days. Seven is a number representing completion in the Bible. Each day the worship leaders and military have to wrestle with the taunting of the army of Jericho stationed upon the wall of the city. Each day the Hebrew people have to wrestle with the thought that they feel ridiculous. Each day they must discover how much they are willing to trust God.

The **second lesson** is that the demonstration of the power was displayed in connection with worship. The trumpets continually sound as they march. The long trumpet blast and the shout are praise for the victory that God is about to bring. God delights to make His power manifest in the midst of the praises of His people! It is interesting to consider the creation account, recorded in the first chapter of Genesis, "God spoke." For example we read that God said, "Let there be light." We see that God spoke, rather than God thought. There is power in the spoken word of God; and there is power in the Spirit-prompted praise of the lips of God's people.

As God's people demonstrated their dependence and worship, God made His power manifest. The walls of Jericho fell just as God had promised. The archaeological

evidence confirms that the walls fell outward. The army did not batter the walls in, but God brought the walls down. The enemy was defeated.

A second example occurred during the time of the kings. God made His power manifest in a special way during the reign of good king Jehoshaphat of Judah. The neighboring nations had joined together against the Hebrews. Jehoshaphat set himself to seek the Lord in prayer, and proclaimed a fast throughout the land. All the people gathered together to seek help from the Lord.

The king sought to intercede for the people. Jehoshaphat reminded God: that all power is in His hand. The king also reminded God of His past deliverance, the nation's worship of God, and God's promise of future victory and deliverance. As the king declared the nation's dependence upon God, Jehoshaphat declared that the people had no power against the army, and the people did not know what to do, but their eyes were upon God [See, 2 Chronicles 20:1-22].

As all of the people prayed, and waited on the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord came upon one of the Levites...a worship leader. The Spirit of the Lord is associated with the power of the Lord [see, Acts 1:8]. Interestingly, it was a singer, a worship leader, whom God chose to use rather than a general, a king, or a prophet. Through the worship leader God brought forth a comforting promise, "Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's..." God promised the Hebrews that they would not need to fight the battle. They would merely position themselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who was with them.

Sometimes it is extremely difficult to stand still in difficult times and worship, simply trusting God's power. Yet the king and the people bowed before the Lord, and worshipped Him. Then the Levites stood to praise the Lord God of Israel with voices loud and high. These people were responding to God's promise of what He was going to do rather than responding to something that God had just done. They expected God to show Himself strong on their behalf, and they desired to worship and praise Him.

As the people went out to battle, Jehoshaphat gave the final pre-battle instructions, "Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe in His prophets and you shall prosper." God delights to work in an atmosphere where people trust Him. It is comforting to know that this power is available to us simply because we are real people, with real lives, trusting in a real God.

Then the king appointed those who should sing to the Lord, praising the beauty of holiness. Then the singers went out before the army saying:

"Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever."

Now when the singers began to sing and praise, the Lord defeated the enemy. The battle was won by the Lord just as he promised. The people of Judah and Jerusalem then collected the spoil, and returned to Jerusalem rejoicing and praising God. So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord.

The first lesson we must learn is that God delights to make His power manifest where His people are praising Him. Sending a group of singers into battle, ahead of an army, is an unlikely military strategy, especially when you have told the army that they won't need to use their weapons or even fight. Yet this is exactly the situation that God

creates so that His people depend upon Him; and He receives the glory when His power is manifest.

There are probably many battles in our lives where God wants to give us victory if we are willing to praise Him and depend upon Him. The enemy of men's souls wants to prevent people from worshipping God just as Pharoah sought to keep the Hebrew people bound and unable to be set free to worship God. People are bound by drug and alcohol abuse, pornography, lust, coveting material possessions, and a host of other chains. The answer is a one-step program...the power of God. As people decide to worship God, live in dependence upon Him, and seek to obey Him, the enemy is defeated by the power of God.

Similarly, the enemy wants to destroy marriages. God loves marriage, and delights to see the family as a means to prepare generations of fruitful worshippers. Satan has a corresponding hatred of marriage, and seeks to prevent families from worshipping God. Accordingly he seeks to destroy families with his weapons of doubt, discouragement, despair, and division. The victory is not won by attending more marriage conferences, seminars, or reading more books about marriage. There is nothing wrong with these resources, but the answer to defeating the enemy is in the power of worshipping God!

God's people have the honor of defeating the enemy, and the weapon is the power of God unleashed in praise and worship:

Psalm 149:6-9

Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD!

God's people are instructed to have praises on their lips, and a sword in their hand. There is a connection between praising God and defeating the enemy. The honor of defeating the enemy is given to all of His people. We are told at the end of the psalm to praise God, because the power to defeat the enemy is made available by God for us to appropriate.

The second lesson we must learn is that God's people should continue to praise and worship Him after the power has been displayed and the victory has been won. As the people gathered the spoils of battle they returned to Jerusalem praising God. And they proceeded to the Temple with musical instruments rejoicing and praising God. They were worshipping God and giving thanks for the demonstration of the power that was manifest.

Too often the Body of Christ fails to remember what God has done. We fail to rejoice and praise Him, and we fail to continue to worship Him. We effectively remove ourselves from the environment where God delights to demonstrate His power. The result can be losing ground to the enemy.

For example, consider a marriage where a couple has been seriously struggling. They are constantly fighting and they are contemplating a divorce. They agree to try it

God's way. They begin to worship Him, depend upon Him, and seek to obey Him. Amazingly, they begin to experience growth and healing in the relationship. After two months they begin to feel that everything is going so well that everything is fine, so they start to drift from the Lord. As you might expect, they start to revert to old attitudes and behaviors, and they lose ground to the enemy. Essentially, they failed to continue to worship God, and they were no longer seeking to appropriate His power.

In the New Testament, the power of God is clearly connected to the work of the Holy Spirit and is manifest as God's people worship Him.

After the resurrection, Jesus assured the disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit had come upon them; and they would be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth [see, Acts 1:8].

The power of the Holy Spirit would be manifest in such a way that people would see Christ in His disciples, and would be drawn to God. Jesus did not simply mean the demonstration of miraculous power, although this power had been evident. Rather the transformation from barren wanderers to fruitful worshippers would demonstrate to the world that Jesus is alive, and validate His identity as Messiah.

In the New Testament, God's power continues to be manifest in mighty ways as God's people seek to worship Him. As the early church gathered in the upper room, there were one hundred twenty awaiting the promise of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were in prayer and supplication with one heart. The early church was worshipping, and anticipating an experience with the power of God [see, Acts 1:12-15]. They expected that, as they worshipped God, that they would receive the power of the Spirit.

Jesus had told the disciples that they would receive the Promise of the Father, referring to the Holy Spirit; He told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received the power [see, Luke 24:47-49]. It is important to see that they needed to wait until they had received the power of the Holy Spirit before they could be His witnesses. Also, it is interesting to note that the Lord did not have to tell the disciples that while they were waiting they should be busy worshipping. Essentially, because of their desire to worship the true and living God, they were chosen vessels for God to pour His Spirit into.

When the day of Pentecost came, the disciples were all together with one heart worshipping God. There God poured out the promise of the power of the Holy Spirit. This mighty outpouring is the birth of the church:

Acts 2:1-4

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Clearly the outpouring was manifest such that all realized that something had happened. At Pentecost there were displays including the sound of a rushing mighty wind and tongues, as of fire, sitting upon each of them; and they began to speak with

other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Certainly we should not expect that the display of power in the life of a believer will always be like the display at Pentecost.

Nevertheless, there are lessons to glean. First, the manifestation of power was given to those who sought to worship God. There is a nexus between worship and the power of God.

Second, the manifestation was recognizable to all. People realized that something had changed. Sometimes the power will be seen by others even before the recipient is aware of the change. At Pentecost, the tongues as of fire, sitting upon each of them, could be seen by others in the room before the person who received had seen. When someone yearns to be a fruitful worshipper, God will honor that desire and pour out the Spirit; and he will change!

I remember when I was a new believer, only about six months old in the faith. My employer called me into his office and asked me to close the door. My heart started to race as I quickly began to wonder what I may have done wrong...being told to close the door did not sound like a good thing. My boss proceeded to tell me how pleased they had been with my work during the last six months, and that they were real pleased with my attitude. I had assumed that I had always been an exemplary employee, and could not imagine what my boss was referring to. Nevertheless, he saw that change was manifest before I did. Furthermore, even though I had not yet told my boss about my new found faith, his observation was timed almost to the day that I received the Spirit of God.

Suffice it to say that a fruitful worshipper will bear the fruit of the Spirit. And that fruit will be clearly seen like a tree in a garden that is so full of fruit that its branches bow. The power of the Holy Spirit is necessary to be transformed from barren to fruitful, from wanderers to worshippers. The fruit of the Spirit is described as: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of a believer is a demonstration of the power of God.

Third, the power was manifest to defeat the enemy of men's souls. As Peter was filled with the Spirit he began to explain the events to the Jews who had gathered to worship in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Peter quoted several portions of the Old Testament Psalms and Prophets, as the Spirit spoke through him, to demonstrate that the events at Pentecost were a fulfillment of God's promises, and confirmed Jesus' identity as the Messiah. That day about three thousand souls were saved, and the enemy's power over them was defeated.

We have seen the dilemma of failing to utilize the power, and we have seen the availability of the power to defeat the enemy. Now we will consider the power to deliver God's people.

DELIVERY

Jesus taught the greatest lessons that the world has ever heard. One of the Master's greatest teachings occurred in the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew, chapters five through seven. Jesus gave us a model prayer beginning, "Our Father."

Jesus taught us to pray to be delivered from evil, or the evil one. There we are reminded of the power available to deliver us.

In the Old Testament, we see the power demonstrated as Daniel is delivered from the lions. Daniel's enemies sought to take his life, but Daniel was in great favor with King Darius. So the enemies tricked the king to sign a decree that anyone who worshipped any god besides the king would be cast into a den of lions. As expected, Daniel continued to openly worship his God despite the decree.

The king was greatly sorrowed because even the king could not change the law, and he realized that he could not save Daniel. So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." [See, Daniel 6:16]

Although the king could not deliver Daniel, he knew that Daniel's God could. And that, because of the nature of Daniel's God, and Daniel's heart to worship, Daniel's God would deliver.

The next morning the king rose early and found that Daniel's God had in fact sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths so that Daniel was delivered. The effect of the deliverance left quite an impression upon the king, such that he also sought to worship Daniel's God:

Daniel 6:25-27

Then King Darius wrote: To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

The king realized that Daniel's God is in fact the living God who delivers and rescues. As Daniel was delivered from the power of the lions, the power of God was manifest and stirred the king to want to worship God along with his subjects. Effectively, not only was Daniel delivered, but also the king and likely many of his subjects were delivered as they heard the testimony and believed. Interestingly, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Magi, or "wise men," who came from the East to worship the newborn King of the Jews more than four hundred years later, were influenced by the lessons learned about God, following the deliverance of Daniel.

Here we see two important lessons. First, the power of God was demonstrated in connection with Daniel's commitment to worship God. Despite the decree prohibiting worship, subject to the death penalty, Daniel trusted God and worshipped. Second, God's deliverance stirred those who had not yet trusted in God as their deliverer and savior, to believe.

In the New Testament, we see the same power to deliver manifest as Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Phillipi [Acts 16]. Paul and Silas had been beaten and cast into the inner prison and their feet were fastened in the stocks. Essentially, they were in the worst part of the prison, they had been beaten with rods so that their bodies were

striped, and they were stretched out in torment as their feet were placed in the stocks. Their condition was most pitiful.

Despite these circumstances, we learn that at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, and the prison doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

Here again we see the lesson of the connection between worship and deliverance. In difficult circumstances, where we yearn for deliverance, it is often difficult to worship God. The heart to worship, especially in difficult times, is a display of God's power. But when God's people are worshipping despite difficult circumstances, God delights to make His power manifest in special ways. In the account at Phillipi we see God's power manifest in an extremely special way. This is the first occurrence of "Jailhouse Rock."

At Phillipi, as in the case of Daniel, we see that the delivering power had a significant impact in touching the lives of those who witnessed the experience. We learn that the prison guard was awakened from his sleep by the earthquake. When he saw all the prison doors opened he assumed all the prisoners had escaped. He drew his sword and was prepared to take his own life rather than face the punishment for allowing all the prisoners to escape during his watch. One can imagine the scene, dust settling and a hush following the rumble of the earthquake. The silence is broken by the sound of the metal sword scraping against the sheath.

Just then Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." The jailer was so moved by the events that he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas; and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..." We learn that not only did the jailer believe, but his whole household believed as well [see, Acts 16:29-34]. Again, we are encouraged by the lesson that not only does the power of delivery impact the worshipper, but it also influences the lives of those who see and hear the testimony.

Jesus encouraged us to pray for the power to be delivered from evil and the evil one. He wants to give us the power to be delivered from pride, anger, bitterness, jealousy, and a host of other evils that keep us from becoming fruitful worshippers.

We need to realize that sometimes we don't receive the power because we are not worshipping. Sometimes we don't receive the power because we don't expect the power to be manifest. In Acts chapter twelve we learn that Peter was imprisoned by Herod, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. It is interesting that the church didn't start a protest rally, or make an escape plan to break Peter out of the prison. Instead they worshipped God and sought to intercede in prayer.

As they worshipped, God delivered Peter. Despite the chains and the multitude of guards, an angel of the Lord came and set Peter free. So Peter went to the house where the disciples were praying for him to be set free. As Peter knocked on the door, a girl named Rhoda came and recognized Peter's voice. She was so excited she forgot to open the door and ran in to tell the others that Peter was at the door. Ironically, the others told her to be quiet because they were busy praying for Peter to be freed. When

Peter kept knocking, and they finally opened the door, they were amazed that it was truly Peter.

In other words they were busy worshipping and praying for God to deliver, but they were surprised that God did deliver. Sometimes we are just like those disciples. It is comforting to know that God remains faithful even when we fail. But it is important to realize that God delights to demonstrate His power in an environment where we faithfully worship Him.

Also, we should see that there was power released to deliver Peter even when Peter wasn't there praying for the power. God may deliver others to demonstrate His power in response to those who are worshipping.

The key is to discover that God's power flows supernaturally in a very natural way when we worship Him. In summary, we have seen the dilemma or the problem of an absence of power in the lives of believers. And we have seen the availability of power to defeat the enemy or deliver us. As we seek to become fruitful worshippers, we appropriate this power and bear the fruit of Christ-like character.

POWER STUDY GUIDE

1. How would you explain the apparent increase in "spiritual things" but the decline in godliness?
2. Describe how we can "play church" without appropriating the power of God.
3. In the context of worship, what are some counterfeits to the true power of God?
4. Do you believe that a lack of power is a problem in the church today?
5. How might we try to finish in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit?
6. Imagine someone in Joshua's or Jehoshaphat's army. How might they feel about implementing the battle plan? How can those feelings be indicative of attitudes about the power of worship?
7. Why do you think God delights to defeat the enemy when we are worshipping?
8. Why do you believe it is difficult to remember to worship God after the enemy is defeated? What are some of the dangers of failing to continue to worship?
9. As a worshipper how have you been delivered? What effect, if any, has your testimony had on others?

Chapter 7: Praise

WHY WE PRAISE

We recently recorded a C D at the church called “POP Music.” The Letters POP stand for “People of Praise.” We firmly believe that God’s people should be people of praise. We will see that it is God’s desire that we praise Him.

At our church we do concerts called “Raise the Praise.” Sometimes we have guest worship leaders, and sometimes worship teams from the church. We gather for about two hours, and just praise and worship the Lord. One night, when we were having a concert featuring worship teams from the church, I asked a woman if her family was coming to “Raise the Praise.” She told me, “With our bands, it would be just like Sunday morning, so why bother going?” I think sometimes we forget why we praise. We don’t praise God because there is an event. Sometimes an event, like one of the Feasts of Israel, can be a catalyst to stir us to praise, but our reasons to praise are different.

God’s house is to be called a house of prayer and praise. The connection between prayer and praise is seen in Isaiah 56:7, “My house shall be called a house of prayer.” The Hebrew term *tephillah*, translated “of prayer,” means a prayer that is set to music and sung in formal worship. The term is frequently used in the Old Testament in the context of an intercessory song. The verse in Isaiah could be translated: “*My house shall be called a house of prayer and praise.*”

Creation worships naturally and continuously. Consider the water flowing to the edge of Niagara Falls. How awkward it would be if the water came to the edge, and refused to go over. Yet God’s creation worships in a very natural way. Consider the praise of creation noted by the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:12

For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

On the other hand, people are given a choice. As Jesus began His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the date we know as Palm Sunday the whole multitude of disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Some of the religious leaders called to Jesus, and told Him to silence His disciples. But He answered and said to them, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.” [See, Luke 19:37-40.]

Jesus was revealing a fundamental truth: God will be praised! As those who have been created in His image, we have the privilege of praising Him. But if we neglect the privilege, then creation will nevertheless continue to declare His praise.

Music is one of the great ways that the church can praise God. Martin Luther was used by God to begin the Protestant Reformation, and he also gave the church many beautiful hymns. Luther said, “Music is God’s greatest gift...It has often so stimulated

and stirred me that I felt the desire to preach. I place music next to theology and give it the highest praise.”

Pastor Jack Hayford has also been used to bless the church with music. He noted, “Worship so often travels best on music.”

Christian music instructs the mind, inspires the emotions, and challenges the will. Inspired music has the ability to stir the heart, mind and soul. The response of praise from our lips demonstrates our relationship with God.

Why should we praise God? There are probably an infinite number of reasons why we should praise God, but for the scope and purpose of this study we will consider the following:

Required
Right
Reasonable
Revealing
Responsive

REQUIRED

The apostle Peter, in his first letter, shows the church that we are required to praise:

1Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...

The church, like the Hebrew people before, has been chosen by God. We are described as a royal priesthood which speaks to our role in leading worship individually, and as an assembly. We are described as a holy nation in the sense that the church has been set apart to God for His good pleasure and purposes. We are told that we have become His own special people for a specific purpose, that we may proclaim the praises of Him.

The contrast between our old life before we knew Christ, and a new life in Christ, is described as the contrast of darkness and light. He has brought us into the light so that we might be able to learn of Him and appreciate Him. Our praise is required not only because it glorifies God, but because it makes Him known to others.

RIGHT

We also see that praising God is the right thing to do:

Psalm 147:1

Praise the LORD! For *it is* good to sing praises to our God; for *it is* pleasant, *and* praise is beautiful.

There is an imperative call to praise that is found in many of the psalms. The psalmists exhort us that we are to praise God. We respond to God's goodness by doing the right thing and praising Him. There is joy in praising God because of the goodness He shows to us as His children, as well as to all creation. Essentially, the psalmists tell us that it is right to praise God because He is good and pleasant. This praise is beautiful. In and of itself there is pleasantness and goodness in praise. It has a quality of intrinsic beauty, because God is the object of praise.

I have been to a countless number of rock concerts before I came to know the Lord. I have seen a lot of performers who are icons. I've been to a lot of famous venues, and I have sung a lot of songs there that were anthems for generations. Many times my emotions have been stirred. Many times I've lit my lighter and held it aloft, along with thousands of others in a darkened arena, as a memorable song was played. Yet, I can't recall my soul being stirred.

Praising God stirs the soul so that we are touched in our spirit. I've been in church sanctuaries where I have seen God's people singing to Him. People with hands lifted up [generally no cigarette lighter], people singing with all their hearts, people crying, people kneeling in reverence, and people putting their hands together in exaltation. I've seen those people in every manifestation. Frequently I have reflected just how good and right the whole experience of praising God has been.

When you are praising God you never have to look back and wonder, "Was I doing the right thing?" You just have a sure sense in your soul that you are doing the right thing. Furthermore, you never have to look back in hindsight as the years roll along and wonder whether you were doing the wrong thing. There is no sense of shame or guilt when we praise God because it is right.

REASONABLE

We learn that praising God is reasonable. We praise God for who He is [adoration]; and we praise God for what He does [thanksgiving.]

Psalm 150:1-2, 6

*Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament!
Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Let
everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!*

All of God's creation that has breath, especially mankind, is called to praise the Lord. The Hebrew word *nesemah* denotes all living creatures that are given life by the creator, but in particular mankind. Nevertheless, the angelic host of heaven, the song of the birds of the air, the roar of a lion, and the praise of His people, are reasonable responses to God. God is to be praised for His mighty acts [ie. what he does], and His excellent greatness [ie. who He is].

In the book of Isaiah we see King Hezekiah pour forth praise to God:

Isaiah 38:19-20

The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I do this day; the father shall make known Your truth to the children. The LORD was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the LORD.

King Hezekiah is responding to God's promise to extend his life. The king has difficulty expressing in words his gratitude for God's gracious forgiving love and the promise to extend his life. Hezekiah's reference to making known God's truth to the children may be a general reference to the next generation of Hebrews. Or it may be a reference to Hezekiah's anticipation of God bringing forth an heir to the king during the extended period of the king's life. Regardless, the king is going to declare his praise to God. Not only will the king declare his spoken testimony, but the praise of God shall be known in song.

Not only was Hezekiah's song sung, but Hezekiah encouraged the singing of the songs of David and Asaph in the Temple worship (2 Chronicles 9:25-35). It is only reasonable for us to want to respond to God in praise for what He does in our lives. Hezekiah could not help but want to praise God for His goodness. The expression of praise seems to often flow easier when accompanied by music/song.

A similar response of praise is expressed by King David as he gives thanks for the coming of the ark to Jerusalem:

1Chronicles 16:23, 31

Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; and let them say among the nations, the LORD reigns.

The ark was a tangible manifestation of the presence of the true and living God. God had allowed the ark to be captured by the Philistines during the reign of King Saul because of Israel's disobedience. Now the ark was being returned to its proper place in the tabernacle. David offered sacrifices to God, and blessed the people in the name of the Lord. David then appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel. Stringed instruments, cymbals and trumpets accompanied the praises.

David then delivered his song to the worship leader and his brethren to express thanks to the Lord. First Chronicles sixteen records the almost thirty verses of praise that comprise David's psalm. David's heart overflows with praise to God for what God has done in returning to Jerusalem. At the conclusion of the psalm, God's people respond and praise the Lord. In effect, the leader's expression of praise for what God has done helps stir the people to follow and respond in praise to God.

This is merely a reasonable reaction to who God is and what He does. It does not surprise me to see God's people respond in praise. What is remarkable is the lack of praise offered by God's people. We of all people have reason to praise God because we understand who God is, and we should appreciate what He has done for us.

Consider the testimony of Horacio Spafford, a Presbyterian businessman. He and his family lost all of their worldly possessions in the 1871 Chicago fire. Mrs. Spafford and their four daughters set sail for France unaccompanied by Mr. Spafford, who was unable to attend due to business commitments. The ship sank and, although Mrs. Spafford survived, all four of the girls were lost at sea. Sometime later when Mr. Spafford was crossing the Atlantic on his way to England the ship's captain summoned him to the bridge. The captain showed Horacio the place where his four daughters had lost their lives. Horacio was inspired to pen the following praise:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot Thou has taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

Regardless of our circumstances, it is reasonable for us to praise God in response to who He is. Like Horacio Spafford, the fruitful worshipper has the mature faith to want to worship and praise God even in our greatest trials. Even when our hearts are breaking we can know that it is well with our souls.

REVEALING

We also discover that we praise because it is a testimony to others:

Psalms 96:1-4

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.

We are to proclaim the good news of His salvation; and declare His glory and wonders to all. The psalmist notes that singing to the Lord can be the medium to reveal God to the world. Three times we are told to sing to the Lord. The repetition is for emphasis. The three references to singing are also consistent with the three exhortations to proclaim, declare and praise. The psalmist connects the praises of God's people with revealing God to the world.

Similarly, we see in Acts chapter 2, at Pentecost, that those who were present each heard in his own tongue the wonderful works of God.

When our church met in a storefront, people would walk down the breezeway, and as they would walk past the church on Sunday morning they would see people praising God. Often people would hear the music, and hear people singing. They would watch people raise their hands or clap their hands together. People who did not even know the Lord would be drawn in by the praises of God's people. They would be attracted like moths to a light, because they were stirred by the praises of God's people.

I remember countless times during worship team rehearsals that people would be walking past the church and would hear the worship team. They would come into the church even though they hadn't been to church in years, or did not even know the Lord. God was drawing them to Himself as He was being revealed by the praises of His people.

One Sunday morning we had a large wooden cross standing in the breezeway of the shopping center. People from the church had been encouraged to bring a small cross to church and nail it to the big wooden cross. There were many crosses, of all colors, materials, and sizes, affixed to the cross when a couple came walking by during a church service. They looked at people worshipping God and looked at the "cross of crosses." They moved close enough to the door to listen, and then a woman from the church went out to speak with them. Moments later they drove to the church and took a crucifix from their car and nailed it to the cross. They were so stirred by people praising God in that way that they wanted to praise God. Suddenly, the cross had been revealed with a new significance.

My wife has a worship team that recently released a C D She loves to carry copies in the car or in her purse. She will meet people who don't yet know the Lord, and give them a copy of the disc. The C D has great music, and Christ-focused lyrics. She realizes that the C D is a musical tract that reveals Jesus to people in song. Praising God is a testimony that reveals God to others.

RESPONSIVE

The church praises God in response to the expression of joy and gratitude that we experience. Consider the practical wisdom of James, the brother of Jesus:

James 5:13

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

We are told that when we are cheerful we should sing to the Lord, or about the Lord. When we reflect on our joy, and we are grateful to God, we respond with praise. It is good for God's people to respond in song to express our joy. If you haven't had the experience of singing along to the praise music playing on the car stereo, or singing praise songs in the shower or the kitchen, you don't know what you're missing!

We need to respond to God. It is a desire that fruitful worshippers have to express. David understood the need to respond and encourages us:

Psalms 100:1-4

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

There are four responses that we see flowing from knowing that the LORD is God, and our maker, and that we are His. First, we want to respond with **a joyful shout**. We respond with joy to God. God is far more concerned with the condition of our heart than whether we have perfect pitch. Often we are concerned about singing on key, because we are too concerned what other people are thinking rather than being concerned about what God thinks. God delights to hear a response of a joyful shout. Note that we are to respond with a joyful shout, not a whisper.

I have a cocker spaniel at home. Every day when I come home that dog runs to greet me. She shakes her tail so much that I'm waiting for it to fall off. I always get a kick out of her response. When my wife Karen opens the door and comes out to greet me with the dog and the boys, it doesn't get much better. If the dog gets really excited, she might let out a bark. That's like a joyful shout. God wants me to respond to His presence with that kind of joy and enthusiasm. He's not looking for me to bark, but He delights to hear a joyful shout.

The second response is to **serve him with gladness**. It is good to respond to God and desire to serve Him. But note we are to serve Him with gladness. It is a pleasure to serve God. Serving God is a "get to, not a got to." When we are serving because we want to give back to God, we serve Him with gladness, rather than complaining or grumbling. Too many times I have seen people serving who approached their ministry with all the gladness of Eeyore. That is certainly not a response to God. When we are grumbling and complaining about our ministry, we are likely responding to our circumstances rather than God. We can take our eyes off God, and focus on our expectations, our frustrations, and our perception of other people's failures.

We have a refrigerator at church, and I like to drink cola. There have been many occasions where I have brought a twelve-pack of soda and placed it in the fridge. Two days later I go to the fridge for a soda only to discover that the youth group, staff or church leaders have taken every single soda. I begin to think, "That stinks! Here I am, loving these people and serving them, and they can't even leave my sodas alone. At least they could save me one can out of the 12-pack!" That's when the Lord gently reminds me in His still small voice, "Is this how you love My sheep, Bruce? You won't even give them your sodas?" I generally respond by pointing out that they didn't even save me the last one, but my argument doesn't seem to impress the Lord. He wants me to serve Him with gladness, and the only way I can do that is by responding to Him and all that He's done for me. In other words, if I respond to Him, I will be less likely to be disappointed when other people don't meet my expectations. Where is your soda? Consider the place where you have grumbled or complained in service, because you have failed to respond to God. Instead, respond to Him and serve with gladness.

Third, we respond with **thanksgiving**. It is good to occasionally count your blessings. It is better to frequently count your blessings. We realize how much we have to be grateful for if we take the time to consider those things. When we are responding to the love that God has shown us, and when we consider that He has saved us, we respond with thanksgiving. Unfortunately, we can quickly lose the appreciation for the things we were once grateful for.

I love Thanksgiving; and it is one of my favorite Holidays. I love the family time, the football; and I love the turkey. I even like the leftovers. I like taking turkey sandwiches to work with thick pieces of white meat, lettuce, and mayo on fresh bread. But after two days of leftovers I'm not too excited about leftovers, and I've probably lost my attitude of gratitude. Sometimes it's helpful for me to remember people who would be so grateful for turkey leftovers. I've been in places on mission trips where breakfast was beans and rice, lunch was beans and rice, and for dinner they change the menu...rice and beans. I'm sure they would be grateful for a turkey sandwich, leftovers or not. But really, that's merely looking at my circumstances relative to someone else's. I could just as easily reflect on someone who has so much more than me, and become more ungrateful. The real key to gratitude is to respond to God. The New Testament focuses primarily on our spiritual blessings [see, Ephesians 1:3-14]. When we can focus on the spiritual, rather than the physical, we have every reason to respond to God with thanksgiving.

The psalmist encourages us to be thankful to God, not merely thankful as a general approach to our circumstances. An optimist tends by nature to look on the bright side of things. A little child who is an optimist can walk into a room full of manure, and be excited thinking there must be a pony in the room someplace. A fruitful worshipper is not naïve in responding to life, nor are they what the world might describe as an optimist. When Corrie ten Boom was in a concentration camp during World War II she and her sister were placed in a barracks that was infested with lice. Corey dreaded the lice, but her sister reminded her that God wanted them to be grateful in everything. It turned out that the German soldiers frequently avoided inspections in that barracks because of the lice, and that allowed the sisters many opportunities to share the Bible with other prisoners. God has everything under control, so we can respond with thanksgiving to Him.

Fourth, we respond with **praise**. We enter His courts with praise; we come before His presence with singing. When our hearts are touched by God we want to respond in song/ praise to God. I'm not suggesting that our lives become like a Broadway musical where all of our dialogue is set to music. But it is characteristic of fruitful worshippers to praise God, and song happens to be an excellent medium to express praise.

Some people like to sing, and responding to God in song is very natural for them. My wife Karen loves to sing. She sings praise to God all the time around our house. I'll hear praise from every room in the house when Karen is there. Although she likes to sing, I don't believe that she is singing merely to sing, because almost all the time the songs that she sings are praise songs. Sometimes she is singing along to music on the stereo, but frequently she is merely responding to the touch of God upon her heart.

On the other hand, I'm no natural singer. I couldn't carry a tune if it was in a basket with a big handle. I don't generally sing when there is no song playing in the background, although I occasionally find myself singing purely in response to God touching my heart. Nevertheless, I love to praise God at church, and love to sing as the worship team leads. I love to respond to God and praise Him as I'm listening to praise music in the car. I see my experience with singing as a response to God with praise.

What I find to be really exciting is someone who generally doesn't like to sing, whether in public or in private. And they find themselves suddenly singing in response to God. Whether at church, or in another setting, God gets a hold of their heart and they find themselves spontaneously responding in songs of praise. We need to realize that singing praise is a proper response to God.

In **summary** we see why we praise. We see that praise is **required**, because we have been called out by God for the purpose of proclaiming his praise. We see that it is **right** to praise God for His goodness. We see that it is **reasonable** to praise God by expressing adoration for who He is, and thanksgiving for what He does. Praise **reveals** God, and is a **responsive** expression of the joy and gratitude we experience. Once we discover why we praise we need to consider how to praise.

HOW TO PRAISE

When we consider the subject of how to praise, we want to distinguish biblical principles from subjective tastes. Praise and worship involve subjective expectations as well as objective aspects. Sometimes when we consider our attitudes and actions in regard to praise we confuse our subjective standards as being God's standards. For example, someone who considers the church choir to be the pinnacle of the worship experience may look at the youth band's alternative music and say, "That's not worship." Someone who loves the music of the youth band might be thinking that hymns sung at church are "dead."

It is interesting to look through the book of Psalms and notice that several of the psalms were set to a particular tune. But God sought to preserve the words, and not the tune. The most important aspect of praise music must be the lyric. Effectively, what makes Christian music "Christian" is not the music; and what separates worship from secular music is not what many of us think.

As we explore the subject of how to praise, we will consider the following key principles:

Message
Music
Modern

MESSAGE

Christian music should be distinguished from secular music by the content of the message. The fundamental test is, "Does the message of the lyrics bring glory to Jesus?" The message of the song should strengthen our relationship with God. The words must help us to focus on God, and our relationship with Him. The book of Psalms contains songs focused on who God is, as well as songs that focus on our relationship with Him. But the message, and not the music, is primary.

Christian music should be distinguished from the "Christian Music Industry." Contemporary Christian music was effectively born out of the "Jesus Movement" of the 1970's. God used Pastor Chuck Smith and the Calvary Chapel Movement to provide a

forum for an expression of music by Christians. Marantha Music was created to provide a means to make the music tangible, and distribute the music to provide blessings to those who heard the music. The focus was the fact that these were Christians who were making music that expressed their love for God, and making Him known.

The “Industry” has the same desire, but it must navigate its mission through the dangerous sea of commercial viability. There is a natural tendency for conflict between the “bottom-line” and the “lyric-line.” Sometimes the message is “sacrificed” to enhance commercial viability.

The importance of the message of praise in the Christian life is expressed by the Apostle Paul:

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Preliminarily, we link praise with the “word of Christ.” Paul says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” The word of Christ contemplates the message of the gospel, and the teachings of Jesus, and in fact is a sufficiently broad concept to allow for the Old and New Testaments. The word of Christ is the message; and it is to dwell in us, and is to be communicated by us to one another, and to God in praise. The importance of the message is seen in the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation brought music back into the church because it brought the Scriptures back in- singing songs inspired by the Word.

Three mediums of expression of praise are described: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. **Psalms** is a reference to the Book of Psalms, which was used as a hymnal or songbook in the synagogue and the early church. **Hymns** are early church works that focus on the works of Jesus. Our English word hymns comes from the Greek word *humnes* meaning praise of God. Many commentators believe that the New Testament contains portions of these songs [see, e.g. 1Tim.3:16, Eph.5:14].

Spiritual song is likely intended as a general term. The Greek phrase *pneumatikos oide* means God-breathed or inspired song. The term provides liberty to express the Christian life experience. Each generation can offer a tangible expression through song of their experience with God, but the praise is to be inspired by the Spirit of God.

Paul wrote a similar exhortation to the church at Ephesus, and also reminded them to praise using psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs:

Ephesians 5:18-19

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord...

In this passage, Paul makes a connection between praise and the Spirit of God. Believers are to be controlled by the Spirit and not drunk with wine. Drunkenness is an excessive indulgence in pleasure that squanders or wastes life, and is contrary to being filled with the Spirit. In other words, a believer should be controlled by the Spirit, not “spirits.” A desire to praise God indicates that a believer is being controlled by the Spirit.

The connection regarding the Spirit also relates to the message of praise. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are told that all Scripture is given by *inspiration of God* or is God-breathed. Similarly, our praise is to be God-breathed. Effectively, Spirit-prompted praise will inspire a message that is consistent with, and based on, the Word of God. When someone approaches me and says, “Pastor Bruce, God just gave me this song...” If the lyrics communicate a message that is inconsistent with the Bible, I know the song did not come from God. The message is essential.

MUSIC

Praise music is expressed in a variety of styles. Some believe that praise music is best expressed in acappella music. This is a Latin term meaning according to chapel, and refers to music or song without instrumental accompaniment. This style is presented in choral singing. Others believe that a piano or organ is the best way to praise. Still others believe that acoustic instruments only are the best way to praise. Some believe electric instruments are the best way for this generation to praise.

Unfortunately, we tend to utilize our subjective bias and prejudice as a standard rather than letting God’s word be the measuring rod. As we explore the Bible, we will discover that instruments, volume, tempo and rhythm are not obstacles to praising God. Consider some of the examples from the psalms:

Psalm 150:3-5

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with clashing cymbals!

Psalm 144:9

I will sing a new song to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You.

Psalm 81:1-2

Sing aloud to God our strength; make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob. Raise a song and strike the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the lute.

Psalm 92:3

On an instrument of ten strings, on the lute, and on the harp, with harmonious sound.

Psalms 98:5-6

Sing to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm, with trumpets and the sound of a horn; shout joyfully before the LORD, the King.

The Scriptures show us that God can be praised with loud instruments such as percussion, horns/trumpets, as well as a variety of stringed instruments of varying volumes. God is praised with a variety of instruments including the voice. Similarly, the nature of the instruments, along with the lyrical theme, suggests a variety of tempos. For example, a song of lament and a song of exaltation may be suited to different instruments and tempos.

Accordingly, we see that instruments, volume and tempo should not be obstacles to praising God. Yet there is frequently a conflict in places of worship regarding worship style. Ironically, champions of a particular style will often grasp for an apparent spiritual pinnacle by asserting that their style is “real worship” and that other forms are not really worship. When it is a truly matter of style, rather than a biblical standard, the irony is that we demonstrate our lack of maturity as worshippers when we condemn another style of worship. Although it may not be “our groove,” that does not mean it’s not worship.

It is interesting to remember that God saw fit to preserve the lyrics of the psalms, and He saw fit not to preserve the music. For example, we are told that Psalm 81 was written by Asaph, and was to be played on an instrument of Gath. But we do not know what instrument is being referred to. Furthermore we do not know the tempo, or whether the time signature was intended to be 3/4, 4/4 or any other time signature. This allows for liberty to express praise in a variety of styles.

There are cultural preferences regarding rhythms and styles. In Latin America, Africa, and North America there are often different preferences regarding rhythm and instruments. Inner-city Rap and Hip-Hop, Punk and Grunge all bring a different “flava” to praise. We might not embrace Bavarian “oom-pa” music, but what’s wrong with a “Polka Praise Party” if it draws people to the Lord?

My point is simply this: we tend to confuse “our groove” as being the borders of the universe of worship. When we consider the music of praise, and our desire to worship, many of us have become comfortable with our particular style of music. We become resistant to change, and our praise and worship is hindered.

Experts are not exactly sure how music was used in the worship services in either the tabernacle or Temple. We do know that the Levites were responsible for this part of worship. Music was an important part of the sanctuary service during the reign of King David; and his son Solomon made music an important part of worship in the Temple [see, 2 Samuel 6:5; 1 Kings 10:12].

Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (Ethan) were worship leaders under David’s authority, and David was under God’s authority. Therefore, God was to be the One directing worship. Asaph led a choir of singers and musicians at Jerusalem. Heman and Ethan had similar teams at the tabernacle at Gibeon [see, 1 Chronicles 16:4-6; 39-42]. These choirs had 4000 members; 288 were trained musicians who directed the lesser-skilled musicians [see, 1 Chronicles 23:5; 25:7-8]. The musicians were divided into 24 courses or teams, each containing 12 skilled musicians. The worship teams consisted of musicians who played stringed instruments and cymbals to accompany the singers [see, 1 Chronicles 15:19-21].

As we consider the scene we realize that there are 24 teams, and there are musicians and singers of varying levels of ability. Presumably, there was at least a slightly different style as each team led worship. What is the likelihood that the people had favorite worship leaders? It is not too difficult to imagine the scene where two worshippers are comparing different worship teams and leaders; *"I sure like when Asaph leads worship instead of Ethan. He uses too many cymbals. I wish Asaph led worship all the time."*

People are going to favor one worship leader or team over another. There is nothing wrong with having a particular style of worship that we like the best. Nor is there anything wrong with having a favorite worship leader. But the problem is when we find it difficult to praise God beyond a narrow range of music style. The answer to this situation is to be willing to "expand our groove" and learn to worship God in a wider variety of musical styles. We need to be willing to learn and willing to change. If we continue to rigidly cling to one style of music we tend to inhibit growth. And we tend to put God in a box, because we limit the musical style of worship despite God's liberty in this area.

MODERN

There is a tension between the modern and the traditional. In the 1960's and 1970's, contemporary Christian music became popular in places like Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard. Soon thereafter, contemporary Christian music spread through the country. The musical style was often folk or rock. The style was distinct from, and in conflict with, traditional hymns sung by choirs. A conflict between the modern and the traditional was stretching the fabric of unity. Change is frequently accompanied by tension.

Previously, the hymns had been the cause of conflict as the agent of modern change. The hymns were the contemporary form of worship as the traditional Gregorian chants were being replaced. Martin Luther and the Reformation were criticized as they introduced 16th century contemporary praise to the church.

The music of the 70's generation is now seen by some as outdated, ancient, and a "dinosauric" relic of a bygone era. The next generation has its own groove, and its own expression of worship and praise. It is never comfortable to discover that what was your cutting edge music is now being played in elevators. Similarly, those seeking to worship on the edge are afraid of contaminating the mix with a fossil. Accordingly, a tension exists between the heritage of the past and the needs of the present.

Jesus warned us of the need to remain flexible. When wineskins become hard and inflexible, they become brittle and are unable to expand or be flexible. When new wine is poured into the skins, it expands as the wine ferments. The skins are unable to deal with the tension so they break, and the wine is spilled. A church that rejects any modern expression of praise has likely become or is becoming an old wineskin.

When contemporary or modern worship is typically frowned upon and viewed as, "Not really being worship," there is a yellow warning flag. We need to remember that it is the message that generally distinguishes praise and worship from secular

music. This allows for a great deal of flexibility in the musical expression of the message. The general rejection of the modern is an indicator of a strangle-hold on the past as being God's "true expression of praise." This grip on the past chokes out the potential life of the present. Furthermore, the position mischaracterizes God. Although God never changes, the expression of worship by succeeding generations exercising their liberty in Christ does. When we refuse to allow for this liberty, we end up putting God in a box and mischaracterizing Him.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is a danger in rejecting the traditional as being antiquated and obsolete. There is so much to be gleaned from the awesome expression of worship that has ministered to successive generations literally through the centuries. Flexibility allows us the wisdom to hold onto elements of the traditional while embracing the modern.

The Bible tells us to "Test all things; hold fast what is good." [1Thessalonians 5:21] We want to approach the traditional and the modern with an eye towards testing, and finding that which is acceptable, good, and worthy to hold onto. A similar sentiment has frequently been expressed by Pastor Chuck Smith: "Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken."

Jesus imparted truth to the disciples in His teaching that was in addition to the teaching they had received in the Old Testament. He told His disciples the importance of receiving the new revelation in addition to the old:

Matthew 13:52

Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

The model of appreciating the value of both the new and the old is also seen specifically in the context of worship. The Scriptures show us that there are new and old songs in heaven:

Revelation 15:3

They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!"

Here, we see the song of Moses being sung in heaven. The song of Moses is the earliest recorded song in the Bible. Not only do they sing the "classics" in heaven, but the Bible shows us that they also sing the new.

Revelation 5:9

*And they sang a **new song**, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. [Emphasis added]"*

The word we translate “new” is the Greek word *kainos*, which refers to something different in kind and nature, and also implies fresh. *Kainos* can also imply something superior. Here there is an idea of freshness, but also a recognition of the celebration of newness in proclaiming the ministry of Christ’s completed redemption.

The book of Psalms also encourages us to sing to God a new song:

Psalms 33:1-3

*Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the LORD with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a **new song**; play skillfully with a shout of joy.*

Psalms 144:9

*I will sing a **new song** to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You...*

Psalms 149:1

*Sing to the LORD a **new song**, And His praise in the assembly of saints.*

Psalms 96:1

*Oh, sing to the LORD a **new song**! Sing to the LORD, all the earth.*

Psalms 40:3

*He has put a **new song** in my mouth—Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD. [Psalms references emphasis added]*

Accordingly, we see that we are encouraged to embrace both the traditional as well as the modern. The people who desire only the new don’t realize what they are missing when they reject the old/traditional. When you reject the traditional hymns you reject a wonderful expression of doctrine. When you pick up a hymnal and glance at many traditional hymns you can’t help but be impressed by the doctrine that is being communicated in song. Similarly, there is much in contemporary music that is praiseworthy. The church would do well to expand its reach, and grasp both the traditional and the modern in its praise music.

Another issue that comes up is the use of “cover songs” in worship. Cover songs refer to the use of a secular song, and slightly changing it to present it in the church. Generally, I try to shy away from cover songs during worship at the church. I believe the reference to “new songs” and the Greek term *kainos* refer to something that is different in kind and nature. I am sometimes concerned about the tendency of cover songs to draw our attention towards secular things, especially reminiscing about the past before I knew Jesus. Accordingly, I prefer a worship service at church to avoid cover songs.

On the other hand, Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress is our God” was adapted from a catchy tune popular in German bars. Accordingly, there may be a place for cover tunes in worship services to try to build a bridge to reach those who don’t know the Lord. Nevertheless, I prefer to see cover songs utilized in the context of outreach as

opposed to a time set apart for worship. I remember one outreach concert where a band from church did a cover version of the Who's, "My Generation," and changed the lyrics to the theme of "My Revelation." I thought the lyrics were clever and Christ focused. The song certainly connected with the audience. Accordingly, cover songs have value, but perhaps should be used more for outreach than for worship.

In summary, we have seen why we praise and how to praise. We need to let the Bible be a standard rather than our subjective bias or prejudice. We have learned that the message is what makes Christian music. We also learned that there is liberty in regard to musical styles. Finally, we see the benefit of embracing both traditional and contemporary expressions of worship.

PRAISE STUDY GUIDE

1. If your church had "Raise the Praise" concerts, where people gathered to worship for about two hours, what would be some of the reasons people would give for going or not going? How do some of those reasons reflect our attitudes about praising God?
2. How can music help us to praise?
3. How does the worship team(s) at your church help or hinder worship?
4. What has God done in your life in the past year that is worthy of praise?
5. What are some of the reasons why some people find it difficult to praise God in song?
6. What is your favorite praise song, and why?
7. What do you believe that song says about you as a worshipper?
8. How can praise help to prepare our hearts for what we might learn in Bible study?
How can praise help us to respond to what we learned in Bible Study?
9. How has your "groove" expanded to include different styles of worship in the last year?

Chapter 8: Participation

If worship were a sport, would it best be a spectator sport or a participatory sport? Many of us have failed to consider how we approach worship from a philosophical standpoint. Do we consider worship to be something that we must participate in, or do we consider it profitable and sufficient to simply observe? Assuming that we come to church to experience God, rather than to see a worship team, it appears necessary to participate. Worship is not entertainment, it is not a performance, and it is not a spectator event. If we want our lives to be transformed by an intimate relationship with God, and we want to be fruitful worshippers, we need to participate. Participating in worship helps us to learn to worship. We learn more by doing than by watching.

In this section we want to consider:

Why We Participate
How To Help People Participate.

WHY WE PARTICIPATE

In exploring the reasons why we participate, we will consider the following principles:

Pattern
Purpose
Prescribed
Privilege
Prepare

PATTERN

First, consider the **heavenly scenes** described in the Bible. Whenever believers are seen in heaven, music and singing and worship are always present [see, e.g. Revelation 19:1-6.] Furthermore, it appears that the only pictures of heaven where worship is not depicted involve the presence of Satan [see, e.g. Job 1:6-2:10; Zechariah 3:1-5] or foretell God's coming judgment [see, Ezekiel 1:4-28]. The pattern reveals that we spend eternity with God praising and worshipping Him. It is interesting to me that we never see believers in heaven who are not worshipping.

For example, in John's descriptions of the heavenly scenes, we appreciate that John is an observer who is recording what he sees. John is not worshipping as such, but is providing a report of what God is revealing. But John does not observe anyone "standing on the sidelines" who is not worshipping. In other words, we do not see John describe that he saw thousands of thousands worshipping God, and he also saw fifty people on the sideline watching them. Effectively, all of God's people are participating in worship.

Second, considering the **sacrificial system** under the Mosaic Law, we see that not only were sacrifices made for the people as an assembly, but each individual member of the congregation had to offer sacrifices. It is a pattern for worship that each believer participates. In this light, the author of the book of Hebrews encourages us to participate in worship:

Hebrews 13:15

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.

All Christians are called by God to be holy priests going before God, and going before the world [see, 1Peter 2]. We are to offer sacrifice of ourselves to God [Romans12:1], and the sacrifice of worship by praising God. This sacrifice is pictured in the book of Hebrews as the fruit of our lips. God delights to receive this type of sacrifice from His people. But we must participate in worship for Him to receive this sacrifice.

A third example of this pattern of participatory worship is seen in ¹Chronicles 16 as **the ark of God** was brought into the midst of the tabernacle. The ark was a symbol of the presence of God. As Asaph and other Levites led the people in worship they shared a psalm of thanksgiving penned by King David. The people were encouraged to sing the Lord's greatness and to seek the Lord [see, verses 9-11]. We are told that all the people responded in agreement and praised the Lord [see, 1 Chronicles 16:36]. What a powerful pattern for worship when all of God's people are participating in praise. Try to imagine what it must have been like as God's people came together to praise Him...perhaps a million worshippers.

I remember when I was in Israel with a group of four hundred worshippers from Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa. We were in an upper room, probably very similar to the upper room where Jesus gathered with His disciples for the Last Supper. As Pastor Chuck was teaching us, he began to lead us in a time of acapella worship. Our voices began to rise as one as we sang "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord." With each chorus our voices became bolder and stronger as the Spirit of God strengthened us to praise Him. No one seemed to be on the sidelines, but everyone began to sing the simple lyrics of praise. The acoustics of the room amplified the passionate cry of God's people. We just continued to repeat the profound lyrics:

Sing hallelujah to the Lord
Sing maranatha to the Lord
Sing Christ has risen from the dead
Sing I give my life to Jesus Christ

As I reflect about the experience, it was one of the most memorable and moving times of worship that I have known. I'm sure that one of the reasons that the worship experience was so profound was because of the dynamic participation. I've learned from the pattern of the Scriptures that we are to participate, and I've been blessed by the experience when we follow the pattern.

PURPOSE

One of the primary purposes of participating in worship together is the development of **unity**. Unity in the Body of Christ blesses God, and is His desire for His church as seen in Jesus' prayer in the Upper Room:

John 17:20-21

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The Lord's desire is for the church to be in unity as a testimony to the world of the Lord's message and mission. When we come together and participate in worship as an assembly it is a powerful testimony to those in the church as well as those outside of the church. The psalmist notes, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" [Psalm 133:1] We are encouraged to "behold". In other words to stop and perceive what a blessing unity is, or how good and pleasant unity is.

When we participate in worship together it creates bonds of unity between us. There is something in the experience of group assembly that is distinct from individual worship. The dynamic is attractive to those in the world who see the whole church participate in worship.

I have been blessed to participate in some wonderful events where several churches have united in worship. Events such as Billy Graham Crusades, Harvest Crusades with Greg Laurie, and Promise Keepers provide a dynamic in worship that not only blesses those who participate, but tells the world a powerful and attractive message about Jesus.

I have observed countless times, when our church was meeting in a shopping center, that people would walk by the sanctuary, and hear the music, and see God's people responding. They would stop and watch, and then be moved to come in. They would see God's people worship, and then they would be drawn to hear the word of God. But what if God's people were not participating in worship? Would people still be as likely to be drawn to God? What if we were not there as individuals to participate, or we refused to participate?

When my kids were small, they would put together jigsaw puzzles with only about six to eight pieces. Each piece was about the size of Texas. Then they graduated to fifty-piece puzzles in the shapes of the states, and they saw how big Texas is. Then they moved to five-hundred-piece puzzles, and the pieces were all significantly smaller. One thing I noticed is that no matter how big a piece, or how small a piece, that was missing, it was always noticeable. We would search for the missing piece, and want to put it in place. Similarly, when someone is not participating in worship, it is like a piece of the puzzle missing. There is a desire to see the picture completed, and to see us all participating. Participation helps to develop unity.

A second purpose of participation in worship is **motivation**. The author of the Book of Hebrews reminds us not to forsake assembling together, because it stirs up love, good works, and exhortation:

Hebrews 10:23-25

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

By coming together as an assembly and participating in worship we can help to encourage, equip, edify, and excite other believers as well as receive from others. We are warned not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, or stated in the affirmative, we are encouraged to participate in worship. We need to participate to be there to motivate others as they grow, and to receive from them so that we can grow. When we don't participate, not only are we unavailable to stir others, but we get "ripped off." People who are participating grow and help others to grow. Sometimes it can be as simple as show-up and grow-up. Not only will we grow, but we will help others to grow.

In our technologically advanced world, it is possible to receive good sound Bible teaching without any real contact with other worshippers. We can hear and watch teaching and worship services through the radio and television. And we can receive through the Internet. But we can forsake the assembly of ourselves together, and miss the benefits of participation. There are many reasons to participate, but we must remember the dual purposes of unity and motivation.

PRESCRIBED

In an era of individualism, in a culture that tends to value the individual over the group, sometimes it is difficult to see the value of worship as an assembly. Yet participating in worship is prescribed. Consider some of the prescriptions:

Psalms 95:1-6

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the LORD *is* the great God, and the great King above all gods. In His hand *are* the deep places of the earth; the heights of the hills *are* His also. The sea *is* His, for He made it; and His hands formed the dry *land*. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

At least eight times the psalmist uses the pronouns us or our. We are being encouraged to worship as an assembly. The body is to come together to participate together in worship.

Psalm 111:1

Praise the LORD! I will praise the LORD with *my* whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and *in* the congregation.

Psalm 35:18

I will give You thanks in the great assembly; I will praise You among many people.

Hebrews 2:12

I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.

God has prescribed that we are to participate in worship as an assembly. Although it is good to worship God when we are alone, Dr. Jesus has prescribed that we also are to participate in worship as an assembly. Sometimes, we fail to fill the prescription and we act like Lone Rangers, or islands. The Lord has prescribed that we are to participate in worship as an assembly for our benefit, and to bless Him. We need to ask ourselves, how often are we together with other believers in church? How often do we get together with other believers outside of church? Look back at your life during the last few months and see if you are filling the prescription.

PRIVILEGE

The key theme here is that God is inviting us to worship Him, and it is a privilege. First, we need to see the invitation in the Old Testament. As you consider the tabernacle and temple models you begin to appreciate the privilege.

The tabernacle was the center of worship for almost five hundred years. The meeting place was surrounded by a gate of fine white linen. The white linen spoke of purity. The linen was trimmed with purple speaking of royalty, and blue which symbolized heaven, and scarlet that pictured the blood of the sacrifice. All of these elements pictured Jesus' ministry. The tabernacle looked glorious. The linen and trim were very expensive, and stood in sharp contrast to the other dwelling places of the Hebrews. The linen gate was a symbol that our sin separates us from a holy God.

The gate had an opening thirty feet wide that was a picture of God's invitation to come and worship. The opening or door was a picture of Jesus' ministry. Jesus declared that He was the door [John 10:7, 9]. By using the expression "the door," Jesus is affirming that He is the only door. Similarly, Jesus declares that He is "the way" [John 14:6] to confirm that He is the only way to enter God's presence.

In addition to the gate, the Holy of Holies was separated from the Holy Place by a thick veil. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and he could only enter once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that the veil was so thick that two teams of horses pulling in opposite directions could not pull it apart. Again, the veil speaks of the separation of imperfect man from the perfect God.

When Jesus gave His life on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, the gospel writers note that the veil was torn from top to bottom [Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45]. The tearing of the veil from top to bottom demonstrates that it was God who tore the veil; and it is a picture of God's invitation to us to come and worship in His presence. In other words, because of the work of Jesus we have the privilege of worshipping the True and Living God.

Let us now examine the privilege in a New Testament context. In the book of Revelation, John describes a picture of Jesus that demonstrates His majesty, glory, power and deity [see, Revelation 1:9-17]. It is distinct from the image of Jesus wearing a little lamb around His neck, with a daisy necklace, flashing "peace signs." John is overcome by the Lord's presence, and falls at the Lord's feet as if dead. Then Jesus lays His right hand on John, and comforts him by saying, "Do not be afraid..." William Barclay has commented, "The hands of Christ are strong enough to uphold the heavens, and gentle enough to wipe our tears."

Beginning in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation, Jesus has addressed letters to His church. In the third chapter there is an invitation, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to Him and dine with him, and he with Me." [Revelation 3:20]. Jesus tells us that He is knocking at the door of our heart, and that, if we will allow Him in He wants to dine with us. The Greek word that is used is *deipnon*. This refers to the evening meal, and was a particularly long meal. People would participate in the meal for hours. All the while talking, developing and strengthening relationships. Jesus is inviting us to an intimate occasion. He wants to spend quality and quantity time with us...we are not talking fast food here. Furthermore, it is important to realize that in that culture, to eat with someone was to become one with that person. Finally, we should remember that, in light of the description of Jesus recorded in the first chapter, we do not sit across the table with an equal. Truly we are privileged to participate in this meal.

In the second chapter of the Revelation, Jesus is commending a church for its labor, patience, and doctrine. But He corrects them for leaving their first love: Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. [Revelation 2:5] Here we are urged to: **remember, return, and re-do**. Stop and reflect about a time in your life when you were passionately participating in worship. Perhaps that time is today, but it may be in the past. Do you remember how you felt? Do you remember what your life was like, and how you participated? What happened, or what got in the way that became an obstacle to participating?

Here Jesus tells us to remember, return and re-do. Sometimes there are things that have gotten in the way that we know are clearly wrong, such as drug or alcohol abuse. Other times, it is the problem of losing our edge as a result of the simple passing of time. Also, we can lose our first love when things such as a job or recreation take the priority for our time and devotion. When Jesus speaks of first love, He is speaking in relation to priority, not chronology. Regardless of the reason we have left our first love, we need to remember, return, and re-do in order to participate.

Jesus warned that if we failed to return and renew our first love, He would remove the lampstand. The lampstand is a picture of God's presence dwelling in a place. Effectively, Jesus is telling us that if we don't appreciate the privilege of a relationship, He will make His presence manifest elsewhere. This is a sobering warning to encourage us to participate as worshippers.

PREPARE

The primary emphasis here is seeing the connection between worship and being prepared to receive from God, and to respond to God. In the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Mark, we see Jesus and the disciples participate in the Passover feast or meal. We refer to this meal as "The Last Supper" or "The Lord's Supper." During the course of the meal the participants would sing from the hallel or praise psalms.

Near the end of the meal we are told, "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" [see, Mark 114:26]. It is at the base of the Mount of Olives where we find the Garden of Gethsemane. It is here at the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus prepares to recover that which was lost in the Garden of Eden. At the Garden, Jesus prays in preparation for the cross...only hours away.

The fact that they sang a hymn is not incidental. The Passover psalms concluded with the singing of The Great Hallel, Psalm 136. This psalm repeats twenty-six times that we are to "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good! His love/mercy endures forever." There is an apparent irony that Jesus is singing this song as He prepares to be crucified to pay the price for mankind's sin. Nevertheless, Jesus is preparing by participating in worship. It is as we worship God that we can receive from God, and respond to Him.

Similarly, we see the connection between worship and preparation in the life of the early church. In the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Acts we learn that the Church that was at Antioch was worshipping the Lord. They were likely singing praises, praying, fasting, teaching, and speaking forth God's heart. They were prepared to receive from God, and respond to God. As they worshipped the Lord, The Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." We see that they continued to worship, and then Barnabas and Paul began their missionary journey [see, Acts 13:1-4]. Note that, as they worshipped, they received from God [e.g. direction for Barnabas and Saul]. Not only did they receive from God, but they responded to God. When God called them to go, they went.

When we sing together we want to hear from God; and when we have sung together we want to be prepared to receive from Him as we study the Bible. And as we participate in worship, and receive from Him, we want to respond to Him. As we participate in worship we are prepared to be ambassadors for Jesus in the world.

HOW TO HELP PEOPLE PARTICIPATE

In this last section, we want to consider some of the issues that may impact a congregation's ability to participate in worship. This study is important to all worshippers, but should have special application for lead worshippers. We want to

consider how we can help people to participate in worship. We will focus on the following key concepts:

Repetition
Ratio
Remember
Respect
Response
Restraint
Rehearsal

REPETITION

As songs are repeated, they become familiar, and people can learn the songs. As people learn worship songs they no longer need to look at the lyrics. This allows people the liberty to close their eyes and focus on Jesus. It helps us to fully participate in worship if we are able to close our eyes, consider God, and not be distracted by things that we might see around us.

RATIO

A lead worshipper needs to consider the ratio between new songs and old songs. There is a need for repetition to help people learn songs, but there is also a desire and need for new songs. It may be helpful to limit the number of new songs to one or two new songs in a worship set. This may provide a proper ratio between new and old.

REMEMBER

The issue here is the length of the lyrics. Generally a song with fewer lyrics is easier to remember than a song with extremely lengthy lyrics. Today, many churches project song lyrics from a projection system. But I remember using overhead projectors and transparencies. I would see a song that had so many lyrics that it had to be printed on two transparency sheets, and I would not expect to easily remember the lyrics. On the other hand, many of us have committed many simple praise choruses to memory. The ability to remember a song can help us to worship.

In defense of lengthy lyrics, the Book of Psalms reveals several lengthy songs. Notwithstanding the astronomical one hundred seventy-six verses that comprise Psalm 119, there are several other psalms with a substantial amount of lyrics. Accordingly, we would be wrong to reject a God inspired song because of lengthy lyrics. As we consider how to help people participate it may be wise to remember that a person's ability to remember a song may be impacted by the lyric length.

RESPECT

A worship leader needs to respect the congregation's need to participate in worship. This requires a balance between desire for personal expression and the congregation's needs. For example, song arrangements that feature complex harmonies, and wide vocal ranges, may be difficult for many in the assembly to participate. Also, frequent time changes may make it difficult for a congregation to find the down beat. The congregation wants to put their hands together, but they can't figure out when they are supposed to clap. Changing from 3/4 time to 7/8 time, to 4/5 time can be an odyssey that will leave many feeling lost.

John Lennon of the Beatles was asked why so many of their songs were composed in 4/4 time? Lennon responded that, "four-four was the rhythm of the heart." Now I'm not sure that this is an anatomically true statement, and I don't agree with much of John's theology, but a simple rhythm makes it easier for people to participate. Sometimes more elaborate expression leaves the congregation watching rather than participating. Although there can certainly be a benefit to simply listening and reflecting upon a song, I believe that generally, it is superior for the assembly to participate. Suffice it to say, a worship leader should have the liberty for personal expression in worship, but that liberty must be balanced with the congregation's desire to participate.

RESPONSE

What response is the worship leader seeking to elicit from the congregation? For example, some songs tend to stir a congregation to raise their hands to the Lord, and some songs tend to cause a congregation to clap their hands. Other songs may provoke a congregation to weep. Worship songs can facilitate exaltation, edification, and evangelism. Exaltation describes songs of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. Edification describes songs that build-up, and comfort the body. Evangelism describes songs that focus on reaching the lost.

Worship should refresh the participants. As David ministered to Saul, the distressing spirit would depart from Saul and he would become refreshed and well [1 Samuel 16:23]. A worship leader will be used by God to refresh the congregation, and comfort the distressed. Leaders need to be sensitive to the opportunity to refresh.

A worship leader should be led by the Lord in the selection of songs with an appreciation of a likely response from a congregation. Personally, I encourage worship leaders to avoid a formula approach to worship. By this I mean that a leader need not utilize a formula such as: worship songs that reflect the theme of the pastor's message; or a particular tempo formula such as 2 fast songs, 2 slow songs, 2 medium, and 1 fast song. Rather, I believe that leaders should have liberty as God directs the selection of songs. Nevertheless, I believe that it is incumbent upon a worship leader to have a sense of what response God is seeking, and what response a song is likely to elicit.

A leader should also be sensitive to God's desire to minister to the assembly through a word of prayer, exhortation, or encouragement. God may want to use the worship leader to communicate to the church, because God is seeking a particular response from individuals or the group. It is essential to realize that we must be aware

of a desired response, and avoid the danger of being insensitive to the issue. God desires a response from His people, and the worship leader should be an instrument to elicit the response(s).

RESTRAINT

The leader must demonstrate restraint in seeking to draw attention to self, and must seek to give all the glory to God. The primary issue is the worship leader's motive. When David was a young man, he was stirred to express his love for God in song. He was a man after God's heart, and effectively played for an audience of One. David's worship was pure and uncomplicated. Then David kills Goliath and he becomes a very public figure. Soon thereafter, David is recognized as king. Along the way, David is recognized as the sweet psalmist of Israel [2 Samuel 23:1].

We can imagine that it became increasingly difficult for David to keep his motive pure. Every time that David pens a psalm, and provides it to the worship leaders to share with the assembly, there is the temptation to take some of the glory. As the people are blessed, they likely gave praise to David, rather than giving glory to God. A fruitful worship leader demonstrates restraint in resisting the temptation to steal God's glory.

How does a lead worshipper learn this type of restraint? Consider David's experience when the ark was returned to Jerusalem. David danced before God in his undergarments. David's wife rebuked him and said, "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" David responds by affirming that his worship was before the Lord. In other words, he was worshipping before an audience of One. David had no motive to seek the attention of anyone else. This is the first key to restraint.

David then goes on to explain, "And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor." Here, David reveals the second step, we need to remain humble. Even though others might rebuke us as the king's wife, or praise us as the maidservants, we must remain humble in our own sight. Worship is all about Him, and not about us.

REHEARSAL

Lead worshippers need to be prepared to lead others in worship. Rehearsal helps to hone God given abilities. In the 33rd Psalm, lead worshippers are encouraged to play skillfully. Similarly, Chenaniah, leader of the Levites, was instructor in charge of the music, because he was skillful [see, 1 Chronicles 15:22]. Lead worshippers must be diligent to show themselves approved to God.

We want to avoid the attitude that accepts being unprepared. Trying to excuse a lack of preparation by saying, "It's only church", or "God wants inspiration not

perspiration”, likely fails to honor God. Certainly, there will be occasions when we are unable to rehearse or practice. But these should be exceptions rather than the rule.

Rehearsal helps a team to minister as a team, and helps a congregation to participate in worship. Rehearsal and practice help lead worshippers to be prepared to worship. To be skillful requires effort. Most of us have to practice and rehearse to play or sing well. There are some people who seem to be able to lead worship well without practicing or rehearsing. Yet, when they rehearse and practice they are growing and honoring God.

Finally, worshippers must also be diligent to spend personal time with the Lord. Worshippers need to be men and women who spend time in prayer, and read God’s word. If we are diligent to practice and rehearse, but we fail to spend time with the Lord, we are forsaking the most important need...spending time with Him!

PARTICIPATION STUDYGUIDE

1. What are some of the advantages of participating in worship?
2. How can participating in worship be like offering a sacrifice to God? [See, Hebrews 13:15.]
3. What advice would you give someone to help them to appreciate the privilege of worship?
4. How does participation in worship help us to receive from God, and respond to Him?
5. As you consider your worship experience, what are some of the ways that leaders help you to worship, and what are some of the hindrances?
6. What are some other advantages of participating in worship that you have not already discussed?

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Eugene Peterson correctly notes that, “Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God, it whets our appetite.” The subject we have explored is fruitful worship, or how our lives are transformed by an intimate relationship with God. We need to realize that God desires to take barren wanderers, and teach and enable us to be fruitful worshippers. We cannot truly worship God until we learn how to worship. Furthermore, we cannot give God His proper place in our lives until we apprehend the importance of worship.

In an effort to discover how to become more fruitful worshippers we have considered the following:

Purpose
Person
Preparation
Presence
Passion
Power
Praise
Participation

This study should not satisfy our hunger for God, but should whet our appetite for an intimate relationship with Him. The making of a worshipper takes a lifetime, truly an eternity, but today is the day to take the next step in the journey.