

Personal Worship 5-4-03

Genesis 18:1-8; John 14:23; Hebrews 10:19-22

"Worship!" It is a word we frequently use without much thought. The usual implied meaning is in reference to our Sunday morning worship service. It is what we are doing at the moment. We have come to a place where we gather with others of like faith to sing to God, to hear His word, and hopefully to be changed by the encounter. This is corporate worship. Many of us feel like the psalmist when He wrote, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." We look forward to the time of worshipping God together. We focus on who Jesus is and in the process we encourage one another in the faith. (Hebrews 10:25)

The first time the Hebrew word for worship was used, is in Genesis 18:2. Genesis 18:1-8 (NIV) ¹*The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ²Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. ³He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way--now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."⁶So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread."⁷Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.*

You say, "I didn't read the word 'worship'." No, you didn't. In the Hebrew it is there though. In verse 2, the word *hawah* is translated 'bowed low to the ground'. Since we are seeing so much of the Middle East in the news, we can readily picture this ancient custom. You've seen Muslim men get down on their knees and bend forward until their head touches the ground. That is the picture described by the Hebrew word that is in most places translated 'worship'. As these three strangers approached, somehow Abraham knew that one of them was the LORD. He ran to meet them and worshipped. This is not a church service. Does it fit your definition of the word? It is an act of submission and respect. A different word is used for actions of service that are considered worship, such as the work of the Levites.

After going to my first Promise Keeper event, I decided I needed to give back. I volunteered to man the prayer tent. Men who feel convicted or burdened about something come in to pray. One brother in Christ came in for prayer. He was a worship leader and was struggling with his relationship with Christ. He didn't feel

Commented [notes1]: ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
Heb. 10:25 (NIV)

close to the LORD or inspired as he led people in music. Let me first stop here and say that term is a misnomer. I don't suggest we change it, but the 'worship leader' in a corporate setting should be the Holy Spirit, not an individual. The person we call the 'worship leader' leads the music portion of the worship. Hopefully, he has been led by the Holy Spirit as to which songs to sing and how to sing them. Hopefully he is ready to add or drop something should the Spirit of God direct him or her. But the offering is worship. Testimonies are worship. Sharing the Word is worship. But let's get back to the discouraged brother. Several of us were praying for him. I was asking the LORD what the problem was. "Do you worship in song at home, on your own?" I asked. "No. I practice. I pick out the songs, but I don't worship." Suddenly it hit him. He realized he was trying to do something corporately that he didn't do personally. It's not that you can't do that. It's that you aren't prepared to worship corporately if you don't worship personally. If it is one hour out of 168, it is really out of place with the rest of your week.

In the first use of 'worship' in Scripture, Abraham recognized the Lord had visited his tent. This should call forth worship from our hearts. In John 14:23 Jesus told us that if we obey His commands, He and the Father would come and make their home in us! Each believer is a temple of God. He is always with us, but sometimes the fog clears, and we see He is immanently present and involved in our circumstances. Those are the times when we should run to Him and bow low. The more you watch for Him, the more you see Him present and working His love into your life. I was struggling with an issue and that particular day a magazine arrived that was specifically focused on the issue I was struggling with. Coincidence, or God intricately involved in loving concern. Stop and worship.

We should live a lifestyle of worship.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV) ³¹*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

It doesn't have to be down on your face, but it does mean submitted reverence to whatever God would say to you. Worship should be a part of our daily life. Brother Lawrence was monk who practiced the presence of God. He remained aware of God's presence at all times. He scrubbed pots for a monastery. His goal was to do so to the glory of God. His work was his worship. If he did not do well, he asked for forgiveness and tried to do the next pot to the glory of God. He was obsessed with constant communion with the ever-present Christ who made His home in him. Church leaders came to talk with this pot scrubber because of his simple wisdom and profound joy. He learned to worship as he worked, in his work. "How is it possible to do everything to the glory of God? By doing everything as if you were doing it for Jesus and by carrying on a continual conversation with Him while you do it!" –Rick Warren

Any legitimate thing you do can be done as an act of worship, but we do need to take time to personally sit down with our Savior each day and enter into the heavenly Holy of holies. Our time before God is often spent in prayers of

requests. There is nothing wrong with that, but that is only a small portion of prayer. Prayer should begin with a time of praise for who God is. Our Father in heaven, hallowed is your name! Think of it like your own personal worship service of two, you and God. If it is a struggle, read out loud Psalm 96 or 100. Play a CD of your favorite songs of praise.

Psalm 100:4 (NIV) ⁴*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;*

If we don't schedule a time to meet with our Maker, the day slips by, filled with one thing after another, and before we know it, it is gone. Schedule a regular time, an appointment with God. Start with a psalm or song. Then, worship in your own style. Perhaps hymns call forth worship from your heart. Pull out your hymnal and sing a hymn. It doesn't matter if you are flat or sharp, God doesn't look for perfect pitch, just a worshipping heart. The Father seeks those who will worship Him in Spirit and truth. (John 4:23) Perhaps a contemporary CD helps you focus on Him. Style is unimportant; the heart focused on Him, on His greatness, on His intervention in your life, on His great love, that is what He is looking for in your heart. Raise your hands, fall on your face, sit perfectly still in contemplation. Posture can be expressive but the bottom line is still what is happening in your heart toward God. He's not looking for raised or lowered or on the floor hands but He is looking for clean hands and a pure heart.

Psalms 24:3-4 (NIV) ³*Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?* ⁴*He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.*

Don't copy anyone else's style. Express your heart to Him in any way He leads you.

Worship with your whole being. It involves the mind fixed on Him. It can involve the voice lifted to Him, but true worship is a spiritual activity. It involves your whole being.

Mark 12:30 (NIV) ³⁰*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*

(Joshua 22:5) About a month ago we saw in Revelation 4 and 5 that Jesus is the whole focus of worship. That daily time alone with Him should shut everything else out. Save your requests and concerns for later in your worship time. Focus your all on who He is. This will change the way you make your requests when you get to them. It may even cause you to let go of some of them. I read a quote this week that really exposes Satan's goal. Francis Frangipane wrote, "The accuser of the brethren's whole goal is to get our eyes off of the perfections of Christ and onto the imperfections of one another." When we start focusing on other's faults, we can't be focusing on Jesus.

In February I shared with you about taking a daily road trip in the Word. Part of your time of personal worship can be in His word, letting Him speak to you. As the Holy Spirit points out a verse or two, take time to hear what His Spirit would speak to your heart. If you come to the Lord daily in worship, you will find your

Commented [notes2]: ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.
John 4:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ⁵ But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul."
Josh. 22:5 (NIV)

attitude toward daily struggles change. It is in beholding Him that we become more like Him so that might reflect Him in the world.

Worship extravagantly. You can worship in your act of giving. In the Genesis 18 passage, Abraham wanted to prepare a feast for the LORD. The LORD wasn't hungry. He didn't need water for His feet, bread, steak or cottage cheese, but He let Abraham give it the best he had as an act of worship. The woman that broke the alabaster box of perfume and poured it on Jesus' head was ridiculed by some for her extravagance, but Jesus said her act of worship would go down in history. (Mark 14:4-9) A lot of what we do for the LORD, He doesn't really need. What can we give the Almighty? But He still graciously receives what we give as an act of worship. It reminds me of children giving a drawing to an adult they appreciate. We don't need the drawing, but the fact that they drew it and gave it to us in love causes our heart to go out to them. Jesus displays your stick figure drawings on His wall. He treasures your acts of love toward Him. He knows how hard we try to give Him something to show our love, and even though it isn't much, He values it. Anything you do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship.

How can you express your love to Him for all His goodness to you?

1 Chronicles 16:28-29 (NIV) ²⁸*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength,* ²⁹*ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.*

Worship is the act of drawing away from the world to be in God's presence. Hebrews 10:19-22 (NIV) ¹⁹*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰*by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,* ²¹*and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* ²²*let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

We can enter into the Holy of holies at anytime. We are invited in. The curtain was torn so that we could draw near to God. What a waste of the sacrifice of Jesus when we do not take the opportunity to enter into God's presence and worship Him. "We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God." -- A.W. Tozer, from *That Incredible Christian*-- It is not that God needs our adulation. It is that we owe it. It is due Him. (Psalm 29:2) When we give what is due, He blesses us beyond measure. We have a need to worship. "Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God; it whets our appetite."- Eugene H. Peterson

Finally, personal times of worship prepare us for corporate times of worship. Some weeks I never pick up the guitar all week. When I get ready to play on Sunday morning the guitar is out of tune. My fingers struggle to hit the chords. I can play, but not nearly as well as if I had been playing all week. Our hearts are

Commented [notes4]: 4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume?"

5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

6 "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.

8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

9 I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Mark 14:4-9

Commented [notes5]: 2 Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

Psalms 29:2 (KJV)

tuned to worship corporately when we worship all week individually. We are ready to go into the Holy of holies together. Our eyes and ears are tuned to see and hear our Savior. It is not some mystical experience for those that have been enlightened by secret wisdom. It is God's plan for every believer. "Come unto me," Jesus invites us, "and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." He's not talking about Sunday morning worship alone. It is a daily call. It is a call we can participate in no matter what our activity. Those who heed the call are those who come prepared to worship on Sunday. Their chief thought on Sunday morning is joy for the opportunity to come into God's presence together with their brothers and sisters.

"If we haven't learned to be worshipers, it doesn't really matter how well we do anything else." -- Erwin Lutzer

"Because we are not truly worshipers, we spend a lot of time in the churches just spinning our wheels; making a noise but not getting anywhere. ... I would rather worship God than do any other thing I know of in all this wide world!"
-- A. W. Tozer in *Renewed Day by Day*

It is in worship that we hear His direction for us. All our own directions are fruitless. We have to come to the Master planner and give up our ways and plans and let Him inspire us, breathe into us His designs. Some of you are learning the joy of doing that. It is thrilling to hear God direct your steps and know you are working, not just for Him, but also with Him.

The challenge today is to commit to regular times of personal worship and to grow into a lifestyle of worship. Could anything be more important than taking time to bow before your Creator and express your gratitude to Him? There you will sense His direction. There your heart will be shaped. Are you too busy for God? He's not too busy for you. Isn't that an incredible thought? But it doesn't mean much if you do not act on it. So here again is the challenge. Put into your schedule each day some time to be alone with your Maker. Meet Him in the Holy of holies. The week prayer calendar that I distributed months ago starts with praise and ends with being still before God. Take the challenge, and watch Him transform the way you see the world around you, your understanding of His word as you read it, the meaning of daily work, so that your life becomes an act of worship. His perspective changes everything you see. He is always available to meet with you. Will you take the challenge and put in your schedule a daily time to meet with Him? Let's grow together into a life style of worship.

Psalms 105:4 (NIV) ⁴*Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.*

James 4:8 ⁸*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*

I want my life to increasingly become an act of worship. I trust that our Savior is planting that desire in your heart too!