

## Worship: A Living Sacrifice To God

I'm amazed by worship. There is such a profound difference in seeing people worship God and seeing them perform. I've seen great performances on film, TV and the stage that move me. Yet they don't compare with being in a time of Spirit-filled worship. The difference is clear; worship is totally centered on God. Our being longs to worship Him. We were created to worship, but too often we worship everything but God.

Worship came hard for me. At first, I was consumed by what others would think about me if I sang out, if I raised my hands, if I prayed out loud. Those things scared me. They scared me because they meant abandonment of my self and surrender to Christ. I was self-absorbed.

The Lord slowly and gently turned my eyes and focus off of other people. I then turned my focus inward. I became consumed with perfection. I learned all the words. I listened intently so I would sing on key. I tried to add harmony. Once again, I was tired and frustrated with my-self. God made me focus on Him alone.

I had been so caught up on the details of worship that I missed the whole point. God wants us to worship Him with our whole being mind, body, soul, and spirit. He wants us to hold nothing back. He wants total surrender.

One of my favorite worship songs is "Heart of Worship" by Matt Redman. His plea is mine also. "Lord I'm coming back to the heart of worship. I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it. It's all about you. It's all about you." **(Redman)**

Worshiping in church or in Christian actives is no a struggle. The real struggle is to live our lives as worship to Christ. It is easy when we are swept up in music, prayer, and the Word. It is much more convicting to know that my actions need to be in worship of God at all times. I'm supposed to be a living sacrifice. (Rom. 12:1)

I must admit that too often my life looks less like worship of God and more like worship of self. I just pray to the Lord for my mind to be renewed. I ask Him to open the eyes of my heart so I can see Him clearly. The problem is my focus. What I focus and dwell on I begin to worship. I have to keep my focus on the only person worthy of worship, God.

I'm so thankful for the men and women God had gifted with the ability to sing and write music. So many times God has put the right worship song in my mind to help me. These writers have poured out their struggles and their desire to worship God. Jesus has inspired them through the Holy Spirit and anointed their songs.

Thanks to these songs my daily walk has been strengthened. When I struggle, God helps me to live a life of worship. He has taught me that a life of worship is the Christian walk. We have to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus one step at a time. Worshiping God every moment is true worship. It keeps us from dwelling on the past we cannot change and the future that is in the Father's hands anyway.

When we worship with abandonment, we have true freedom. It is a freedom that most Christians don't walk in. I am part of the prison ministry in my church. I see freedom and abandonment to God in the lives of the brothers we minister with there. God is using their captivity to take their focus off themselves and put it on the Him. The many distractions we have do not exist there. They are left with time. They have the opportunity to listen, read, pray, and worship. Not every one of them sees this opportunity, but the ones who do are truly free. They hunger and thirst after the Lord.

To worship with them is amazing. I am blessed, encouraged, and filled with God's Spirit. It is exhausting, but wonderful. I leave desiring to worship in the freedom and abandonment all the time. That is what my Holy Father wants for me. He desires for us all to come into His house lay everything down at His feet and worship him with abandonment. Why then do we have such a lack of that in the church in the United States?

Could it be that we are too caught up in the routine of our services? Are the services so set in stone that there is no room for change? If we are willing to change are we willing to listen to the Holy Spirit? I would say that too many Christians are caught up listening to their own fleshly self that they don't know God's voice. It is not that He does not talk to us, but it is just that we are too distracted to hear him clearly. When we are yielded to Him, we can truly worship. Yielding to God also opens our spiritual ears to clearly hear His voice.

The youth of my church model listening with spiritual ears to me. Their parents have taught them God's Word. Their parents have shown them Christ's love. Even more than that, they have taught their children that about spiritual gifts. Each one has gifts and talents from God. These young adults are seeking to glorify the Lord in their gifts. They dance to worship. They sing to praise. They perform skits to share the love of Christ. Even as they struggle through the pressures and distractions of being teens they have hearts to worship the Lord.

Their movement ceases to be choreographed and becomes a movement of the Spirit. Rehearsed songs become cries of praise. Scripted skits are transformed into a living Gospel. What causes this transformation? The answer is simple, Jesus! Their whole purpose is to magnify Him. We are created to worship God. If we truly ". . .do all to the glory of God," (1 Cor. 10:1) then we worshiping by living!

The joyous thing is that Jesus does not want us to stop when the music fades. The most beautiful music God hears from His children is the music of a life totally abandoned, dependent upon, and famished for Him.

That leads me to question my-self and the American church. Do we guard our time with the Father so fiercely that nothing can interfere? Are we so hungry for His Holy Word that we memorize it word-by-word and line-by-line? Are we so in love with Him that we would die for Him? More importantly, are we willing to die daily and let Christ live through us? All these things are the characteristics of a living sacrifice of praise. This living sacrifice is so clear in contrast with the world. The world and its' people proclaim to be caring, loving, and filled with light. Yet they condone, approve, and celebrate acts of sin as normal parts of life. Their light is like the moon's light. They are reflecting the false light of their father Satan. He is disguised as an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14) True light in a person's life shines forth from within, because the Father of Lights (James 1:17) lives in them.

My struggles come from Satan's tactic of being subtle change. I worship God, but little by little I am distracted and turned to the false light of the world. In retrospect, I see my life as a living a living sacrifice of praise turned to a dead, unclean, and sinful sacrifice to the world. The thorns have grown up and choked me. (Mat. 13:7) It is at this point when I have to ask for forgiveness, crawl back on the altar before God and praise Him. I praise Him because He is renewing my mind to discern His will. (Rom. 12:2) I praise Him because He continues to fill me with the Holy Spirit who teaches and

shows me the depths of God. The Spirit also shows me my sin through His eyes. Praise God that he desires a living sacrifice of praise!

Each day we have to take up our cross and walk. In doing this, our actions are the incense of praise that the Lord finds so sweet. I just pray that the Lord would help us to see in big and small ways that true life and true light are in Him. It is so sweet, like honey, to worship the Lord. Lord, I pray that You keep that sweetness in our thoughts so we will not forget and become distracted. Satan's sweetness is temporary and it causes cavities.

It is a blessing how the Lord uses the natural world He created to point us to Himself. His word is like honey. Our praises are like the sounds of rushing water. The Holy Spirit is like tongues of fire.

Lately in times of worship, I have felt God's presence and the move of the Holy Spirit when the church is singing. The Lord has revealed to me two images. The first was a campfire.

Wood was neatly stacked and the embers and kindling were burning at the bottom. Then the hardwood catches and the flames leap up to each piece of wood till all you can see is flames. The Spirit lives inside us like embers and kindling that start the fire and keep it going. When we enter in to praise and worship of God, the Spirit is stirred up and we are set ablaze. I have felt in times of deep worship like flames were on my arms and body like the fire on the wood. I've learned that the Lord desires for us to burn brightly for Him. In the process we are engulfed in His light and people see the fire and light of God and not us, the wood. So many times I feel like wet wood. Other times I feel the flames diminishing. I just have to yield to God and ask Him to turn up the flame and consume me. That is extremely painful to my flesh. I know that through it God is exalted and others are drawn to Him.

The second picture the Lord gave me is that of water in its' many forms. The sound of worship with singing, praying, and clapping can sound like rushing water. I have found when I am worshiping the Lord with abandonment that the words and songs flow out of me. I know it is all coming from the Lord. Many times during worship the presence of the Holy Spirit starts like a summer rain that can turn into a downpour. That rain can be on one person or the whole church. The awesome thing is that the more we pour out ourselves in praise, the more He pours Himself into us!

We are called to go into the entire world and pour out our lives for Christ and give to those in need His living water. He is the fountainhead. We are a conduit that brings God to the world. Just like a pipe, we can get clogged. Sin clogs us up slowly and unexpectedly. The water inside us becomes trapped. We can also become greedy and want it all for ourselves. We close our valve and cut off God's blessing to others. Both clogging the pipes and closing the valve cause the water inside us to become stagnant. Then it is unusable for everyone. We have to yield and let the water flow. When we are a conduit, we are truly worshiping the Lord.

The Lord has taught me about balance. A life of worshiping God is a life in balance. Just as I said before, stopping God's blessings from flowing to others makes us stagnate. On the other hand, we can give and give and become a dry well. The point is to give out of the abundance that the Lord gives to us. If we give out of our own strength we will become an exhausted well. How do we maintain balance? Worship is the key. Over and over in the Word, God tells us to rest in Him and be renewed. "But they that

wait upon the Lord will renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles.” (Isa. 40:31) We see in Luke 38:10-41 the story of Mary and Martha. Both sisters loved Jesus and served Him. Martha was busy putting on a seven-course meal and was angry with her sister for not helping. Mary knew that a simple meal would suit Jesus and she chose the better part. She sat at the Lord’s feet worshipping Him. Mary knew the balance of a worship-filled life.

A vital part of worship is just being still and knowing He is God (Ps. 46:10). We are His children and He wants us to crawl up in His lap. He desires us to crawl up in His lap and rest, just as much as he desires us to pray and praise. How can we truly serve Him if we have not learned to be in His presence and listen? How can we truly praise Him if we do not know Him intimately? How can we petition Him in prayer when we cannot talk to Him as our loving father?

“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.” (Ps. 27:4) Living in God’s house, in His presence, 24 hours a day 7 days a week would be wonderful. Well the truth is we are God’s temple. That means Christ lives inside of us. We do not have to go anywhere to dwell with God. Jesus died so that we would have direct access to the Father. The shame is most of us do not take full advantage of it.

God has called us to a life of worship. A big part of that life is to be spent in tabernacle and dwelling with Him. In the Old Testament, God set his tabernacle in the middle of the camp and when He moved so did the people. Now God has set His tabernacle inside us. We need to move when He does and stop when He does. Moses said if your presence does not go with us we do not want to go. (Ex. 33:15) Let that be the cry of your hearts

God had given us marriage to model our relationship with Him. Each person gives and takes. God has build man and wife to balance each other out. Man and wife know each other intimately by spending time together. God desires us to spend time with Him. Listening as He speaks, resting in His arms, and talking with Him. These are all a part of the divine marriage between God and man.

That marriage is pure worship. It will be face to face in heaven. Saints the joy is that, while it will be complete then, we have it now! Do not spend your time wishing and waiting for eternity. Live it now. Worship by dwelling in the presence of the Lord. Jesus gave you access to the Father, take full advantage of it. Climb up in your Dad’s lap! Worship by dwelling with Him. When you leave His lap you will be rested, renewed, and filled. Then and only then can you pour yourself out for others and not be exhausted.