

5 Keys to Worship That Bring Heaven Down

Worshipping our Savior, Jesus Christ, is fundamental to living a faith-filled, Spirit-led Christian life. There are multiple worship methods, plans and styles that vary among cultures and geographic boundaries.

The Lord enjoys the diversity of sincere worship when expressed through His Spirit and in truth. Worship should be a way of life, with many facets of expression.

Some worship leaders declare that a certain defining style of worship is the only correct way to worship the Lord, but that is a narrow view of His inexhaustible riches. Music and song are ways we can praise God's name, but the Word says we can worship God with feasting (Ps. 22:29) and with sacrifices and offerings (Is. 19:21), among other means.

Regardless of the method, the act of worship must be in spirit and truth—from our rational consciousness and consistent with the rest of our lives (John 4:24). We don't have to be great singers or musicians to worship God. But we do need to be in a personal relationship with Him and live with the truth of His greatness reflecting through all we are becoming and all we do.

I have lived under the weight of many unhealthy labels in my life. But I have a longing in me for the King of heaven to label me, along with Mary of Bethany, as an "extravagant worshipper" (John 12:3).

Extravagant worship is not achieved by taking shortcuts. I have tried shortcuts to worship, and I have tried to do things my way, but I ended up frustrated and farther away from my goal.

Worship involves the giving of ourselves totally to the Lord. It is neither a ritualistic activity nor a musical emotion. It reflects the selfless generosity of Christ.

Worship is a movement of our hearts, our thoughts, and our wills toward God's heart, thoughts, and will. To practice extravagant worship, you'll need to get good at saying, "I lay down my life."

Sacrificial Worship Pleases God

In the Old Testament, Noah was an extravagant worshiper. Genesis 8:20-21 tells about his building an altar to the Lord after the flood and sacrificing offerings on it.

Noah had just witnessed the drowning of all mankind save him and his family. Yet he was still obedient to God's instruction to offer a sacrifice of praise when they were on dry land again.

When the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma of Noah's sacrifice, He gave us a covenant promise that He would not ever destroy all living creatures again because of one man who offered extravagant, over generous worship in obedience to God's command. Noah lived through extreme circumstances, but he still praised God in the midst of them.

Likewise, when God tested Abraham, He said, "'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about'" (Gen. 22:2).

Abraham built the altar and then bound his son and laid him on it. But when he took up his knife to slay his precious boy, "The angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!'

"'Here I am,' he replied.

"'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do not do anything

to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son'" (vv. 11-12).

Abraham was excessive in his act of worship. He was prepared to give to the Lord the thing he loved the most.

David wanted to offer a sacrifice to the Lord to stop a plague on the Lord's people. So he asked Araunah to sell him a place on his threshing floor to build an altar (1 Chr. 21:18-22).

Araunah wanted to give the area and livestock needed for David's sacrifice at no charge. But David said, "'No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing'" (vv. 23-24).

When Paul and Silas were in jail, even though they had been flogged for preaching the gospel and now had their feet in stocks, they prayed and sang to God. Suddenly, while they were worshiping, a violent earthquake opened all the doors of the prison.

Thinking his prisoners had escaped, the jailer was so distraught that he was about to kill himself, but Paul and Silas stopped him and led him to salvation before they were released. God supernaturally delivered them from that prison (Acts 16:23-39).

Throughout the Bible, whenever someone demonstrated extravagant worship, God reacted with extravagant blessing. What makes worship extravagant? It must cost us something.

Worship is an act of obedient faith, even when circumstances offer opportunities to fear. It is also a life of extravagant love for God. Worship, love and obedience are tied together.

As you seek first the kingdom of God and obey the Spirit of God, He calls you on to a deeper knowledge of Himself. The first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your

heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (John 14:21-24; Matt. 22:37).

David prayed, "Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name" (Ps. 86:11). Make this your prayer as you serve God passionately with your life. This will cause the blessings of heaven to pour out upon your world.

Love Expresses Worship

To be a worshipper is to fall in love with God, the Author of love, and accept the love He has for you. God gave you His Word as a living love letter that contains everything you will ever need to get through this life and beyond.

His love is at work within us, filling us to the measure with the fullness of God. If we could understand even an inkling of this love Christ has for us, our hearts would be full of extravagant worship for the One who loves us so much.

The many songs I've written to express my love for God don't come close to what I'm trying to say. But I can demonstrate my love for God by living out my part of the Great Commission and bringing the Author of love to our love-starved planet. I can determine to love others as He loves.

When I was saved I cried and cried in the presence of God. Tears of gratitude flowed easily as He restored my heart and filled me with His unconditional love. Now all I want to do is sing of His awesome, healing love forever.

One of the biggest challenges in life for the mind and soul is simply to accept God's love for you as a gift. It is the greatest absolute in your life.

John 3:16 states, "For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (AMP). Because His love is in our hearts, we have the power to love others (1 John 4:7-13).

Loving others is an act of worship toward the Author of love. But until you know through personal experience who God is, you will never know the depth of His love for you. And until you know that you are loved, you can never love others as you love yourself (Matt. 22:39).

Know Your Worth to God

Many people, including myself, have battled with insecurity, inadequacy and intimidation. It is difficult to carry the weight of inferiority into our time of worship.

Worship is a time to focus on who God is. It is a time to enjoy the awesome authority and anointing that He puts on His people who come into His presence with praise. Sometimes the enemy works very hard to keep us from worshiping freely, but sometimes we simply lack discipline in our thought life.

If we read the Word and keep God's truth in our hearts, we will focus our attention on His greatness and on the value that He places on us. God sees all our inadequacies through the blood of Christ. Because of Jesus, our heavenly Father sees us just as He sees His Son—beautiful and perfect.

God looks at us just as a loving parent looks at his children. My three daughters could be naughty, but I look at them, and I think they are perfect.

Unapologetically, I think they are magnificent. That is the heart of a parent. How much more does God look at us and say, "Oh, they are My precious, beloved children."

When you understand who you are in Christ, a rest enters your soul that cannot coexist with striving and struggling. Just as darkness cannot coexist with light, striving for approval does not coexist with confidence in His grace. And who you are in Christ matters more than what you do.

I was the girl "least likely to succeed." But my future has

never relied on anyone else's opinion of my ability.

I'm a testimony of God's grace. The very least we can do is give God our lives and let Him show us the great things He can do through our yielded hearts and hands.

We have been created with the divine purpose of having Jesus as the center of our existence. We were created to worship Him in all we do (Heb. 10:19-23).

Through worship we put Christ as the chief cornerstone of our lives, and the power we have access to in His presence is real. He longs for us to draw closer to Him.

God has cleansed our hearts and made them pure so that we can stand in His presence. We can continue to praise our mighty Lord—to sing, clap, dance, celebrate, get soaked in His presence and be overwhelmed by His grace.

Offer Him Your Heart

One thing that can stop us from being truthful worshippers is feeling as if we have nothing to offer to God. Feeling empty-handed with nothing to contribute to the relationship with God can stop us from plunging boldly into worship.

God says, "I don't need your talent. I don't need your gift. I don't want all the stuff that you can do. I just want you. I want your heart."

God doesn't want what you are going to be or what you would like to be. He wants all that you are today.

When we worship Him, He is exalted, and our problems shrivel in His presence. Everything about us—the good, the bad and the ugly—is decreased as we focus on Him.

Offer yourself to God in worship. Let that explosion of faith force you to praise His name and offer your attention to bless

Him. Through your worship, love and obedience, you will bless God because He looks past all the stuff of life and looks straight at the heart.

Read a companion devotional.

Darlene Zschech *has been part of the Hillsong Church praise team since 1986 and is the co-producer of Hillsong Music Australia's highly successful albums.*