

The Simplicity of Praise

God isn't looking a perfectly sung worship chorus but for the simple expression of our hearts.

Hagan-Worship FILLER It always seems to begin and end the same—a torn envelope, then a tearful stream.

Birthday rituals, especially those between a papa bear and his cubs, have a way of doing that. I'm as normal, I suppose, as any papa bear at the moment when, just prior to the cake and candles, I begin the jubilee by accepting my birthday cards from the kids. Responding joyfully to their eager offerings, I quickly thumb open the cards with heartfelt surprise. Then, without trying to look unappreciative for the coins spent, I swiftly glance past all the artwork and poetry.

You can always tell if the cards were a last-minute afterthought. If the spit on the envelope flap is still wet, then you know there was some fancy scurrying going on in the back bedroom only moments earlier. But after opening the cards, my chief aim as a papa bear is easy—to unscramble the mysteries of “cub scribble.”

If you're a parent like myself, you've probably nodded through the toddler years and mumbled “How sweet!” while reading your cards, only to suddenly find yourself wordless and watery-eyed at the first sight of “I LuVV U dadee.” Few things in life strike the mute button inside a parent's heart like the homespun birthday scribble of an offspring.

Curiously enough, I'm now discovering that the intrigue of scribble is the route to deeper and more pregnant worship! My recent awakening came during a wonderful worship service at the church where I serve as pastor.

Our music associate was introducing the congregation to a magnetic new chorus that was truly bravo. It seemed to

proclaim an added sense of majesty. It had it all—catchy phrasing, masterful orchestration and sound doctrine. It was the kind of new song you wake with, shower with, drive with and sleep with.

But instead of singing, I stood there with my hands in my suit pockets. Instead of becoming enthralled in Jesus, I was lost in a drift. I thought to myself, How can anyone write a song as beautiful as this?

I felt again those jealous and cheated sentiments that come from not being able to fulfill my secret desire of writing worship songs the world would sing. My dilemma is that my private praise compositions tend to be nothing but nonharmonious humming underscored by repetitious words such as “hallelujah” and “Thank You, Jesus.” Most of the time, my worship and praise vocabulary feels at or below preschool level.

Standing there among hundreds who were lost in fervent worship, I felt embarrassed before the King of kings. After many years, I was still living in such immaturity of worship utterance.

Then, almost mysteriously, I began feeling nostalgic about my last birthday party. For several moments I just stood there saturating myself in the emotions I had experienced when my little children presented me with their birthday cards. I had appreciated the professional script purchased from their limited allowances, but it was their own words—no matter how crudely inscribed—that unleashed the core emotions of my fatherhood.

In that moment, my worship journey altered dramatically—not because of an inspiring new discovery of worship language but because God unveiled something very simplistic about our relationship as son and Father—that He as my Father longed for that same informality of expression. Jesus said, “Truly I say

to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all'" (Mark 10:15, NASB).

When it comes to worship, the simple scribble of our adoration is what the Father desires. It is not the high-priced choir leader, the costly chapel carpet or the hired symphony that invites God to be "enthroned upon the praises of [His people]" (Ps. 22:3).

That invitation for habitation is extended as each person who loves the Lord offers with abandonment his spiritual and true affections toward His creator. The kind of worship that reaches beyond the steeple tip and meets with the Father's delight is the very kind I had been ashamed of offering—the kind that is like the undisguised and naive expressions of a child.

Worship is about relationship, and relationship is about discovering refuge and refreshing from life's spiritual fires. The Bible tells us that the Father's presence brings this refreshing. "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

The word "worship" comes from two Greek words, *pros* and *kuneo*. The word *pros* means "to move forward." The word *kuneo* means "to kiss with a sense of awe." Earnest worship involves both a physical action and a loving intent, both a leaning forward with the body and a reaching out with the soul to touch with both life and lyric the divine magnificence of the Father.

Now each Sunday, I see my Father tearing open envelopes, thumbing beyond all the professionalism and seeking to locate the simple worship scribble of each childlike saint. Though at times they are sour-noted and half-articulated, these gestures of love, I know, are categorically connecting with His beauty and heart.

The kind of worship that delights the Father is like the naive

expressions of a child.