

Jack Hayford: How the Church Misunderstands Worship

Over the years I have sought to teach people both why we worship and how to worship. Worship has often been misunderstood as the musical prelude to the sermon, rather than the means by which we, as the people of God, invite the dominion of His kingdom to be established on earth.

Psalm 22:3 says that the King of kings is literally “enthroned” in our praises. Wherever God’s people come together to worship, and where that happens, all the weight of His glory, His rulership, and His dominion are present.

In this atmosphere—where worship ushers in the presence of God—four critically important things take place: first, the Word becomes life, not just an intellectual exercise; then, as His kingdom is established, people will be healed and people will come to know the Lord. Finally, because God is empowering His people, their worship crowds out the borders of hell’s current domain—Satan having been given rulership of this planet by man’s forfeit of dominion at the Fall.

Worship is essential to God’s plan of redemption and provides a strategic avenue for God’s entry into an alienated world. An illustration of this is found in the Lord’s Prayer, which begins with worship: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.”* Then, it extends the invitation *“... Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:9, 10, NKJV).

When we pray in the manner that Jesus taught His disciples, we are first, with worship, reaching into the invisible realm and then, on the grounds of our worship, welcoming the entry of His divine authority, rulership and power into this world.

How then do we worship?

After giving the Ten Commandments, the Lord gave explicit directions to Moses about a tabernacle of worship in which He would come to dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8, 9). The people spent a year at Sinai building the tabernacle according to God's pattern and learning how to worship. God's plan for His people's redemption was to be realized through the priestly ministry of worship. In Christ, all believers have become a *"royal priesthood"* that we *"may proclaim the praises of Him who called (us) out of the darkness into His marvelous light"* (1 Peter 2:9, NKJV).

The biblical patterns of worship involve all aspects of the human personality: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Most people recognize that worship ought to be spiritual from the heart and that it ought to be intelligent. But there's uneasiness about the involvement of our emotions and physical expression. Yet people who acknowledge their own physical and emotional being before the Lord do what in any setting other than church would be considered the most natural thing. The living God has created us with a response mechanism that expresses joy when we are happy or elation and shouting over victory, for example.

The expression of worship should not be confused as a requirement for salvation, but as a means for truth springing to life in the midst of people. When we surrender ourselves to the full expression of worship, the Spirit descends, and room is given for Him to meet every person in a special way.

Worship involves physical expressions founded upon biblical guidelines; they are neither ritual, perfunctory actions or the serving of emotions for their own sake. Among the physical expressions of worship found in Scripture are kneeling, clapping hands, raising hands, verbalized praise, singing hymns and psalms, weeping, laughing, bearing witness aloud ("Amen"), reading the Word aloud, prostrating before the Lord, speaking in tongues, dancing before the Lord, giving public testimony, standing, silence and spiritual song. In 2

Chronicles 20, as many as 11 different Hebrew verbs for active physical worship are found.

In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul proclaims the glory of our Lord and the motivation for our worship: *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ... For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen"* (Romans 11:33-36, NKJV).

And then he summons us to worship with what can be considered our only appropriate response to such magnificence: *"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"* (Romans 12:1, 2, NKJV).

Thus, the Bible calls us to: present our rededicated bodies by kneeling, bowing, raising our heads and hands, and dancing before the Lord; present our revived emotions by shouting and clapping to the Lord, praising aloud, rejoicing and expressing thanksgiving, or by being silent before Him in the beauty of His presence; present our regenerated spirits by worshipping in the Spirit, singing spiritual songs and giving thanks; and present our renewed minds by obedient, orderly, intelligent, sensitive worship with understanding. Even spontaneity must have some point of discipline and control (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The Lord is not displeased by our reticence to the physical expressions of worship, but when we present ourselves wholly open before Him, the compounding of both our life in Him and of His beauty in us takes place. We are made more whole—and holy—in the likeness of Jesus. The weight of his glory begins to seep through our system. Our identity becomes more secure and established, and our sense of sufficiency in the life of

Jesus Christ increases.

The Lord says in Romans 14:11 that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess Him. Therefore, we are summoned to present our bodies, emotions, spirits and minds to Him in every biblical form of expression as He would graciously teach us. And when we worship as His appointed "priests," we invite and administrate His glorious life, purpose and power to be realized not only in our lives, but also in our world.

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