

# THE HEART OF A WORSHIPPER

By Bob Sorge

Many Christians today are talking about a renewed desire - even a new desire - to worship the Lord in a deeper, more meaningful way. But what is true worship? What is the absolute essence, the common denominator, in all of worship? I believe it is seen in the lives of men like Abraham and Job, who worshipped in the midst of the most life-shattering circumstances.

The fundamental essence of worship is this: *Regardless of negative circumstances or complete emotional turmoil, I bow my heart and life before God Almighty, acknowledging His supreme lordship.*

The bottom line on worship is confessing God's lordship when everything that surrounds your life screams, "God's unjust! He doesn't love you! He has forsaken you!" At such a time, the true worshipper says, "The Lord is God. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Perhaps this is what the Psalmist meant when he said, *"Deep calls to deep in the roar of Your waterfalls." (Ps. 42:7)*. In the context of that verse, the writer was speaking of deep emotional turbulence in difficult times. When everything is crashing down on us like a roaring waterfall, we must resort to the deep-down faith that we have in God.

When we feel overwhelmed and don't know why God has allowed a situation to come into our lives, we must reaffirm our basic faith in God. *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!" (Job 13:15 NKJV)*. This is the deep within us - that expression from the depths of our souls that affirms our trust in God regardless of the changing circumstances of life. Worship is the deep within us calling out to the deep in God.

Sometimes this level of worship is best expressed in quietness. *"Be still, and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:10 NKJV)*. This verse has nothing to do with praise, but it certainly applies to worship. There are times when our worship will not constitute the forming of words or phrases but will involve the humble prostration of our souls before God, revering His greatness in silence and stillness.

Since worship is an expression of love, it frequently functions very similarly to marital love. Love does not always need to be verbalized in order to be expressed or appreciated. Sometimes more is said through eye contact than could ever be expressed verbally. Worship involves "eye contact" with God. Worship is *staring* at God!

## Never Postpone Worship

When facing turbulent circumstances, we have a tendency to complain now and postpone worship for later. But Jesus said, *"Yet a time...has now come, when the true worshippers will worship the Father..." (John 4:23)*. Worship operates in the present tense. True worshippers are not satisfied with waiting to praise God around the throne in heaven. The fact that we may have worshipped in the *past*, or that glorious worship awaits us in the *future*, is unsatisfactory. *Now* is the time to enter true worship.

*"Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you." (Ps. 89:15)*. Worship must be learned. It is not a talent with which one is born, nor is it a special gifting for a select few. Worship is the art of expressing oneself to God, and we must learn that expression and open our hearts as channels of the Holy Spirit.

Just as preaching is an art that is learned, our ability to worship is developed through application and experience. Worship is not learned by reading books, or by taking classes, or by going to seminars. Like the art of prayer, worship is learned by doing it.

We should not be impatient with ourselves if we are not now able to worship as we would desire. Learning the fullness of worship is a lengthy process and does not come easily. The lessons God brings into our lives to teach us worship can sometimes be as dramatic as those of Abraham, Job, and David. Responding positively in worship rather than bemoaning the trying circumstances will cause us to grow as worshippers. In many churches we have been taught to work, and we have been taught to witness - but we have not been taught to worship.

## God Seeks Worshippers

We know from Jesus' own declaration that the Father seeks worshippers (see John 4:23). God delights in the lifestyle of worshippers; nothing pleases Him more than the quality of life displayed by a worshipper. It is our duty; then, to endeavor to please Him by learning to become increasingly Christ like in every way.

We want to be worshippers, but sometimes we do not fully understand all that this involves. One of the most outstanding instances of worship in the New Testament is seen in the story of the sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus. Let us explore this account in Luke 7:36-50 to see more clearly the qualities that characterize a worshipper:

*Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner' with him, so He went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of*

*perfume, and as she stood behind Him at His feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.*

*When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner'."*

*Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."*

*"Tell me, Teacher'," he said.*

*"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denari, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"*

*Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."*

*"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.*

*Then He turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give Me any water for My feet, but she wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give Me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing My feet. You did not put oil on My head, but she has poured perfume on My feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."*

*Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."*

*The other guests began to say among themselves, "who is this who even forgives sins?"*

*Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

When this woman came into Jesus' presence, she was weeping. This was the outward manifestation of a heart that was deeply stirred before her Lord. She was repentant, overcome, unreserved. This was not a show. This woman's tears were sincere.

I will confess that, as a man, I find it very difficult to cry. Few are the times when I come to tears before God. And that concerns me, because I ask, "Lord, is my heart too hard before You? I want to be soft and tender in Your presence!" The times of worship that have been most meaningful to me are the times when I've cried before God. Brokenness and tears are truly key elements in worship.

### [The True Meaning Of Worship](#)

We see also that this woman kissed Jesus' feet. This is a beautiful aspect of worship, for the Greek word for worship - **proskuneo** - means "to kiss the hand toward; to do reverence or homage by kissing the hand; to bow one's self in adoration." The derivation of **proskuneo** is thought to come from the Greek word for "dog." Thus the original meaning was "to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand."

When I first discovered this, I was somewhat repulsed by the idea. I asked God, "Lord, am I like a dog before You? Is that all I mean to You?" But then the Lord began to show me some beautiful lessons through studying the origins of this word.

Although I have always been a dog lover, I had a dog for only a few years while I was growing up. Among my fondest memories of "Buster" are the times when we would come home from church and be greeted by him at the door. From outside we could hear his tail thumping against the wall and his paws scratching at the door. And when we stepped inside, he was all over us! Jumping, licking, wagging, thumping, twirling - you would have thought he hadn't seen us for weeks! As I remembered those royal welcomes, the Lord whispered to my heart, "How excited are you about being with Me again when you enter the house of the Lord?"

Then there's the time when your dog comes over to sit by your chair. But he isn't satisfied with sitting next to his master; he has to plop his body right on top of his master's feet. Dogs desire the closeness of physical contact with their masters. Let's not be satisfied just with *being near* the Lord; let us come close to His heart in worship and *lean upon His breast!*

### [Fear Of Man Or Fear Of God?](#)

worshippers cannot go unnoticed. They will attract attention to themselves. For this very reason, many have refrained from entering into the fullness of worship. They are afraid of what others might think of them. Peer pressure affects worship. It has held back countless saints from the blessing of opening their hearts to the Lord. Some folks might say, "Oh, that's just Sister Brown doing her thing again." Others might shake their heads and think, "Straaaange." But this is part of the cost of being a true worshipper.

Obviously Mary was not following the conventional forms of worship -weeping, kissing, and wiping His feet with her hair. There is no mention in the Psalms of pouring perfume on our Lord's feet. David gave no guidelines concerning these things. So we must consider how tolerant we are of unique or "overboard" expressions of genuine worship. There are no formulas for worship because worship is a

*function of the heart*, and the heart will find expression in a variety of external forms.

David escorted the ark of the covenant to Zion, and while dressed in a linen ephod and dancing before the Lord with all his might, he was rebuked by his wife, Michal - *"How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would."* (2 Sam. 6:20) Because of her criticism, Michal was barren for the rest of her life. Likewise, if we become critical of genuine acts of worship, we are in danger of spiritual barrenness.

In the church today, nothing is quite so controversial as worship. Entire churches have been split over matters of worship and the proper way to conduct it. But a choice is set before us: we can either choose to please *men*, or we can decide to please *God*.. It rarely seems possible to do both.

### God's Loving Response

Mary was willing to endure the disapproval of others for the sake of hearing her Master's "Well done." The disciples were surely thinking, "Why doesn't Jesus do something? This woman is obviously out of order! Why doesn't He rebuke her? Why is He letting this thing drag on?" And when Jesus finally did give her His attention, the disciples heaved a sigh of relief. "It's about time He took control of this situation!" But rather than rebuking her Jesus commended her.

What a beautiful assurance this is that when we worship, He will respond! He will turn to us! He will speak to us, for He is eager to do so. The disciples had much head knowledge about worship; but it took a sinful woman - someone who was uneducated in the many forms of worship - to reveal the heart of a *true worshipper* to these disciples.

Spiritual maturity does not exempt one from being a worshipper. We will *never* grow to the point where we are "above" worshipping the Lord. In the Book of Revelation we read of the elders repeatedly falling down in worship before the throne of God - *"... and the twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying 'Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.'"* (Rev. 5:8-9 NAS) In truth, there should be a greater responsibility resting upon elders and the spiritually mature to worship the Lord and to be *examples* of worship to others.

### The Cleansing Power Of Worship

The last words of Jesus to this woman - *"Your sins are forgiven"* - contain a beautiful lesson. The woman worshipped, and *then* she received forgiveness and cleansing. The point here is that it is possible to approach God in worship, even if there is sin in our lives, and become purified. But too often we allow feelings of guilt to rob us of this blessing.

There was a time in my life when I was struggling with a specific, recurring sin that I had difficulty conquering. And oh, the guilt, when it was time to worship! I could not find a release in my spirit because I felt like a failure before God. I withdrew from God, supposing that He was not interested in fellowshiping with a sin-ridden son. For years I allowed guilt and condemnation to rob me of the blessedness of continual communion with my Father!

I had to learn that I must never allow sin to deter me from intimate fellowship with God. God is never shocked by sin in our lives. He never condemns us for sinning. And He never holds us at arm's length when we do sin.

### Conviction vs. Condemnation

God does *convict*, but He never *condemns*. Conviction and condemnation are poles apart. Conviction leads to repentance. Condemnation leads to despair

Conviction results in victory over sin. Condemnation results in abject defeat. Conviction motivates us toward God. Condemnation leaves us deflated and powerless. God convicts. We condemn.

Jesus said. *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."* (John 3:17). Jesus' statement to the woman caught in adultery, after her accusers slipped away one by one, was - *"Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."* (John 8:11).

Guilt and condemnation are among the greatest hindrances in our worship services. And for too long we have heard the wrong solution. We have been told "Repent before the Lord first, receive His cleansing, and then come into worship. Don't come before God unless you've first been purified."

But God has never said that to us! That is a human solution The Lord made His solution very real to my heart one day as I was meditating on this passage in Luke 7. I was impressed with the fact that not until *after* this sinful woman had worshipped the Lord in such a beautiful and extravagant manner did Jesus declare her sins to be forgiven. The progression was this: first she worshipped, and then she was forgiven!

Jesus never says to us, "Wait a minute. There's sin in your life! Don't try to get close to Me and love Me in that condition!" On the contrary, He says, "Come close to Me; lean upon My breast, and let us commune together. Then His promise comes: "And you will be purified as you worship Me!"

We do not get purified in order to worship - *we worship* and are *consequently purified*. The only time it is inappropriate to worship God with sin in our lives is when we have no intention of changing. To worship while purposefully maintaining a sinful life, without any intentions of repentance and change, is hypocrisy. But to worship despite any known sin, when we acknowledge it and desire to receive God's strength to gain victory over it, is the first step toward the solution.

### Flee Into His Presence

I am not supporting a new brand of "cheap grace" - God hates our sin! No sin can survive in God's presence. But this is precisely why, when we need cleansing, *we must flee into His presence. There we receive healing, cleansing, holiness, and purity*. This was the message of Charles Wesley when he wrote:

Jesus, Lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly  
While the nearer waters roll,  
While the tempest still is high!  
Plenteous grace with Thee is found,  
Grace to cover all my sin;  
Let the healing streams abound,  
Make and keep me pure within.

Too often, in the throes of guilt and condemnation, we have turned and hidden ourselves from our source of healing and forgiveness. Condemnation has driven us away from the very Balm that would heal our souls!

Condemnation will rob us of the blessed purification that will come through worship. Condemnation is a whirlpool that will siphon our spiritual vitality until we are consumed. The more we abstain from worship, the greater the separation between us and God. It is our *blessed privilege* as God's redeemed to draw near to Him in times of sin and uncleanness and receive of the cleansing power that flows from His presence.

### The River Of Life

In worship, we partake of the very river that flows from the throne of God. The Psalmist wrote of that river, "*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God*" (Ps. 46:4). This is an allusion to the water of Siloam whose several different courses ran underneath and through Jerusalem and supplied the city with water. Similarly the Holy Spirit provides us with renewing waters as we worship from our innermost beings. Through our worship, the river of God washes over our souls with cleansing and refreshment.

When Ezekiel was caught up in this divine river, the waters rose from his ankles to his knees and then to his waist, until he could no longer walk in the current. During this experience, Ezekiel was told, "*And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes.*" (Ezek. 47:9 NKJV). As the river of God begins to flow during our times of worship, it brings life, abundance, and healing, washing over broken hearts and restoring parched souls.

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