

A Life of Worship

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What is worship? Expressing my love for God for who He is, what He does and what He is going to do.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. ⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. (Gen 4-NIV)

I grew up in a cultural desert. A cultural wasteland.

It was mischief over musicals.

Mayhem over museums.

It was orneriness over opera.

It was running the streets instead of sitting in the symphony.

Not so with Danice. She was schooled in the finer sides of life in Ft. Worth, Texas. Not expensive, just activities a person appreciates like symphonies, theatre, opera and of course the Nutcracker at Christmas.

The sad part is I have done very little over the years to improve my cultural IQ.

So, living in that kind of home with the likes of Danice and Rebekah makes me feel like I am wandering in a cultural wasteland of Star Wars and Lord of The Rings.

Like a sinner shamed for not going to church, I sometimes make my way to a musical hall and let the experience take possession of me for a few hours.

In so many occasions I have returned home to the world of light sabers, orcs and elves completely unresponsive to what the author or artists have tried to do at the musical.

I understand enough about musicals, duh, to know that the story line, usually a rather benign theme from life, is being acted out as vocals unleash hypnotic singing, that leaves me dozing.

My problem? I can't figure out the story line. The story line stays as vague to me as Italian opera. It is not uncommon for me to whisper to the person next me, **hey what is going on?**

Musical or symphony buffs will tell me that the plot is critical to the story. Now, should someone ask me about my experience or evaluation at a cultural production, I often comment how amazingly well-constructed sets where. Wow - did not expect such a long intermission, why not shove the 2-part story together and let us go home early?

Brilliant color in the costumes. Perfect room temperature and plush seating is my level of cultural intelligence.

Don't ask me to offer judgment on the story line, interpretation of the music or the dramatic impact of the characters is not in my wheelhouse.

I usually return home from the experience with a crumpled-up program and go immediately to the refrigerator to make a sandwich.

Clearly, I do not know how to evaluate my several hours of an overly priced cultural experience.

When people engage in the worship of God in a personal experience, corporate worship in a local church, or Christian concert they may respond like the **novice at an opera**. They are seldom instructed in what should be the real motivation behind their worship.

More instruction as to what and why we experience worship might help us cultural clanks.

More often than not, the worshipper responds to the emotional swells of the song but leaves the service in a short time without the heart being changed. The joy of having sung a favorite worship song, bleeds over into the rest of the service, and a person might be heard in the lobby after church saying, "the presence of God was so real today."

Liking or not liking the beat of the drums, the brightness or dimness of the lights or the selection of a favorite song; while in the end is not bad, it is just **not** the real purpose behind worship.

So many are reduced in their worship experience, like me in culture to **fluffy descriptors** of the greatest act of love one can engage in.

The opportunity to love our merciful and grace filled God is pushed to the side as people spend more time concerned about their I-phone than calling on the name of the Lord. Unaware that worship takes one into the throne room of God, they complain about how long they have to stand in worship.

So, what is worship of the King of Kings? Worship is not just music or singing, **it is a lifestyle.** The reason I know this is because you were created by God for His pleasure. Look at *Rev 4:11, You God created all things, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created. (NLT)*

Everything was created for the pleasure of God, including and most of all YOU! And since you were created by God for his pleasure, the way you bring him pleasure is to **love God back.** And one way to do this is to worship. Loving God is called worship.

Now, the challenge of worship for the church and for Christians is that our definition of worship is often misunderstood. When I say the word worship, what do you think of? You probably think of singing, choirs, hymns, dim lights, loud rock worship. Let me suggest that **worship** is your **first purpose** in life.

Now, listen carefully, you were created by God to worship. And you will worship something or someone. Go to any nation or any culture in the world, and you will see people worshipping.

You were wired by God for worship. This is spelled out in *Romans 12:1, Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*

Let me highlight two truths from this verse:

First, worship is my response to God's love for me.

Second, worship is offering ourselves back to God in service.

But it is the worship I offer to God in response to God's love for me, that I want to feature.

Look at what it says, **because of God's great mercy.** God always makes the 1st move. The first sacrifice.

The first act of love comes from God. And that act of love was demonstrated by Christ himself by dying an atoning death to cover my pile of sins.

God creates us. Saves us. Blesses us. Protects us. Forgives us. Dwells in us. Because of these expressions of his love toward us, we respond by worshipping God.

Like my confusion over the value of symphonies, museums, musicals and even the Nutcracker, Christians in worship are often more **confused than transfused** by the power of the one we worship.

Why? Because our singing produces good feelings as we sing songs about God's love, but what I am suggesting is that we should be singing more songs about **Christ's death** and responding with a heart of repentance for sin.

A person can actually go to church and never hear a sermon or sing a song about Jesus Christ death on the cross and the power of resurrection to set you free from sin and self.

And for those who hear about the cross, sing about the cross and even wear a cross it is still possible to be completely unaware or unaffected by the cross.

Like me it is easy to go to a show and miss the story line. For so many the clue phone is ringing, but no one is answering it.

Years ago, I did a funeral with a strong salvation message in my hometown. After it was over, I was standing on Colby Ave, near downtown Everett Washington, and one of the funeral guests came up to me and said, "nice show preacher." Some see church as a show.

So, what is worship? *Worship is my response to God's love for me.*
(Romans 12:1-2)

And the love of God, I want to respond to, and sing about? Jesus' atoning death and resurrection to set the sinner free. Let's not experience worship of Our Great God and miss the centrality of Christ's work in our faith and in our daily lives.

It is not enough to sing about the love of God and then experience warm feelings and shortly after that return home to live the same way we came. Agreed? Agreed?

But, singing more songs about the cross or choosing a worship set that has less cross-less songs is not enough.

We must know **what** the worship song means or **why** it is so important. If we look closely at the first offering of worship offered to God by Adam and Eve's boys, we learn **why**, really matters to God.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. ⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. (Gen 4-NIV)

Why did God accept Abel's offering and reject Cain's?

Here meet two brothers, Cain and Abel who go to church, to use NT language and offer their worship to God. They come to worship. In the Old Testament worship offered to God came in the form of a sacrifice. Prior to this verse, we see no example of Adam and Eve's worship, we first see worship with the boys.

We get a glimpse of what to do in *Romans 12:1*, *to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*

Moses, the writer of Genesis gives us a glimpse and report on their offering. Their worship. Look with me at what boys offered to God. Here we see what they brought to God as taught by their parents.

It says, vs 3, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.

Cain brought an offering of worship from the field. ³ *In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. (Gen 3-NIV)*

It says, vs 4, And for Abel ... And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.

Abel brought an offering of worship from the flock. ⁴ *And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. (Gen 4-NIV)*

Now, you say, how sweet, Adam's boys worship God. Each boy is learning how to have a relationship with God. They each make a sacrifice to God in worship.

Then suddenly, we get from the text, a scathing report from Moses about God's opinion of Cain and Abel's worship.

The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.

So, the question is simple, it applies to our text, and it is applying to teaching on A Life of Worship. Here it is. Why did God accept Abel's offering and reject Cain's?

It is clear that something was wrong with the worship. And at the start of the year, I want to make sure your worship of God is pleasing to Him and not rejected by Him. What? Is that possible?

Yes, when you approach God there is a right way and a wrong way. We saw that with David when he returned the ark to Jerusalem and moved it on a new cart and God was displeased.

⁶ When they came to the threshing floor of Nakhon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. ⁷ The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God. (2 Sam 6-NIV)

If you are going to heaven, plan to serve God and want to please God in worship, you have to do it God's way. Not your way!

What was wrong with the worship? Perhaps, if we look closer at what each boy brought, we can get an answer.

Cain brought an offering of worship from the field. *³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.*

Abel brought an offering of worship from the flock. *⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.*

Seems pretty straight forward to the uninitiated. Ok, do you see that, it is pretty clear. Cain's worship was an offering of fruit; Abel's worship was an offering of the flock. (First, I might add.)

Cain brought some fruit. Wheat fields, vineyards and olive groves are still a salient feature of the Israeli landscape today.

Figs, pomegranates, dates, strawberries, prickly pears and persimmons are all common cuisine of Israel.

Cain brought his fruit and put it on the alter and said, here it is God. I have come to church to worship you.

Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the **firstborn** of his flock. Perhaps Cain neglected to bring the first fruits at the minimum.

Here it is God, I have come to worship you. I have come to church. God then consumed Abel's offering. Whenever God would accept an offering, he would consume it.

One of the most famous examples of God accepting an offering is found on Mt Carmel in the book of 1 Kings 18. It is quite a display of worship and acceptance by God.

³⁸ Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. ³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!" (1 Kings 18-NIV)

Cain's offering was sitting on the alter, and God did nothing. Abel's offering like Elijah's was consumed by God himself.

God really said, to Cain, I cannot accept that offering. And it just sat there. Unconsumed by God. And it is so easy to say with Cain...

...what's up God? I have been working all week, tilling the ground, this offering took some sweat and hurt my back. It dirtied my hands.

I brought you my fruit and I can get more if that is what you want. How many of us think, in our relationship to God it is about works. Effort. Performance. God rejects that kind of worship.

You see, God had told Adam and Eve and therefore through Cain and Abel; in order to come into my presence, you must bring blood.

Sacrifices that God accepts include the shedding of blood.

Why, blood? God tells us in Genesis, when you come into my presence you have to deal with sin.

Worship that God accepts must deal with sin.

The only way to deal with sin is through sacrifice. God tells Cain and Abel; I slew an animal to deal with the sin of your mom and father and I want the same from you.

The Lord made garments from skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. (Gen 3:21-NET)

Did you forget that part of the story guys? Abel brought a sacrifice to deal with sin, but Cain you are bringing me fruit.

What is the point God is making? You cannot worship God without dealing with sin. You cannot come into the presence of God without dealing with sin.

(1) Have you truly worshipped God, if when you leave church or any kind of worship for that matter, and failed and neglected to deal with your sin? Rebellion? Disobedience?

If you have not dealt with your rebellion, disobedience or what keeps God displeased with you, failure to worship properly leaves you holding an offering in your hand unconsumed.

Imagine that? Leaving the temple with your offering in tow. Leaving worship with the same hardness in your heart. The same hate in your heart. The same hurt in your heart.

You might have sung beautifully, but did you really worship if you have not dealt with sin? You might have played in the band on key or led worship on key, but did you worship if you have not dealt with sin?

Here is what so many do in their lives and at church...show up at church, worship by skipping sin and want me to be happy! Let me remind you of the point I want to make regarding this first step in our series.

The worship of God, neglecting sin, does not make God happy!

Ouch, that hurts pastor. It will hurt more if you don't learn how to worship the correct way. I have a couple additional verses, to make my point clear.

Failure to worship God in the first place, leaves you high and dry to deal with your sin. But He goes a step further and reminds us when you worship me, you must deal with sin, or your offering of worship like Cain, I reject it!

Noah built an ark that was covered with pitch inside and out. (Gen 6:14)

***14** So make yourself an ark of cypress^[a] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. (Gen 6-NIV)*

Even though Noah's world and ours is filled with heartache, there was an exception to the rule. His name was Noah. When everyone else was swimming downstream into an abyss of sin, Noah wasn't buying it.

I can't go any deeper into the story without showing you a truth about how patient God is with sinful humanity.

Before God would send the planet into a watery grave, He would give them the maximum time to repent and change. Noah came from Godly seed. In Gen. 5:21-22 we see that Enoch had a son whose name was Methuselah. Most know that Methuselah is most famous for his longevity. He was the oldest living person.

(21) When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. (27) Altogether, Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died (Gen 5).

Methuselah lived 13 times longer than what the Bible tells us the average person normally lives according to Psalm 90:10. Methuselah lived 969 years according to verse 27. There is something else significant about Methuselah and that is in the meaning of his name.

His name means, "when he is dead it shall be sent." Within the name of Enoch's son was a message from God clearly stating, "When this child dies, My flood judgment will be released on this planet."

One detail about the construction of the ark, and it is found in *Gen 6:14, ¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress^[a] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. (Gen 6-NIV)*

The Hebrew word for pitch in this verse is Kopher, the same word as we use for covering. Like the covering on the ark of the covenant. It means to atone for something.

The word Kopher or Kapher used here, and other places conveys the idea God was coating the ark, with a sacrifice of safety, or in other words a sacrifice and pitch was the illustration which meant to ransom those in the ark. The ark was a vessel of salvation from those who would lose their lives if they were not in the ark.

The kind of worship that pleases God, includes songs that ransom you from your sins. As you sing about the blood, God coats your sinful heart with a pitch-Kopher of ransoming blood to protect you from the rains that are coming.

Abraham offered his son Isaac as an act of worship. (Gen 22:5)

⁵ He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." (Gen. 22:6-NIV)

Abraham has experienced many tests prior to Gen 22. None will compare to the one he is about to experience. God's word is clear, this will be the greatest of all tests. All of us have times in our lives when your future seems to balance on a single decision.

² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love — Isaac — and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." (Genesis 22-NIV)

Will Abraham do what God has spoken or act as if God had not spoken. Notice God tests Abraham after his heart is affectionately intertwined with his son. Take your son whom you love...

Nothing could be more difficult than the request connected with the heir of a promise Abraham has waited to experience all of his life. God did this so all of mankind would learn that a mortal and flawed man could love God to such a degree and length that he would lay his son on an altar for sacrifice to the Almighty. **Look closely at the qualities of the decision.**

It was immediate. *Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. (Gen 22:3)*

It was based on faith. *Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and come back to you. (Gen 22:5-NIV)*

It was 100% sacrificial. *Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. (Gen 22:10-NIV)*

Gen 22 is the first-time love, take your son you love and offer him as a sacrifice, the boy and I will worship and come back to you.

Isaac too has a strong faith. A trusting faith. In no place do we see him struggling against his father. He too trusted and surrendered. What a father-son example. A pre-incarnation of a Christ-Father example we see in the New Testament.

And finally, God shows us through Isaiah, that even those accustomed to being in God's presence require an adjustment because of sin.

Isaiah's worship of God dealt with sin. (Is 6:7)

⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (Is 6:7-NIV)

Back to Cain in Gen 4. Look at what happened to Cain, because he failed to offer the right kind of sacrifice, he got all grumpy and depressed. And God warned him, make the appropriate changes or sin, that is crouching at your door will eat you from lunch.

⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. ⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." (Gen 4-NIV)

Worship God with the right heart, and the right message and sin, depression, anger and world of other activities and attitudes that separates you from God can be atoned for because of your worship.

Worship that God accepts must deal with sin.

Father, I give my life of worship to you, as a living sacrifice. I express my love to you God for who you are, for what are doing and for what you are going to do in life.

Father, I express to you in worship the awareness that I can approach you, worship you and love you because of Jesus Christ atoning death. Holy Spirit help me to see my sinfulness, so I can offer the kind of worship that deals with my sin.

And with the voices of many angels and elders I sing,

worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and praise! Rev 5:12

In Jesus Name, Amen.