

Pray for the people you know who need physical healing.

Understanding Worship

An excerpt from

Will There Be Dogs in Heaven?

(part 2)

Continued from Saturday...

“Worship is the expression of enjoyment that comes from entering into my presence and sharing with me the overflowing love and joy that I have in relationship with my Father and my Spirit,” Jesus replied.

“Worship is the expression of the enjoyment...” I repeated. And then, after a pause: “How was that again?”

“Okay,” Jesus replied. “Let’s slow down a bit. If I told you a good joke, what expression of enjoyment would I anticipate from you?”

“What expression of enjoyment?”

“What spontaneous expression would indicate that you understood and enjoyed the joke?” Jesus prompted.

“Laughter?” I replied.

“Yes. Laughter is the expression of enjoyment for a good joke. How about if I’m cooking something really delicious and I offer you a taste. What expression would indicate that you enjoyed what I gave you?”

“Gratitude,” I replied.

“Gratitude would be appropriate, but I’m thinking of something more immediate. What response would you have upon tasting a spoonful of something really delicious?” Jesus asked.

“Oh, uh, I would probably go ‘mmm’.”

“Okay, good. Saying ‘mmm’ would be an expression of enjoyment and appreciation. Let’s try one more: What expression of enjoyment accompanies the slipping into a warm bath?”

“Saying ‘ahhh’,” I replied.

“Good. Now follow me here. Just as laughter is an expression of enjoyment for humor, and saying ‘mmm’ is an expression of enjoyment when tasting something delicious, and saying ‘ahhh’ is an expression of enjoyment when you slip into a warm bath, worship is the expression of enjoyment that comes from being in my presence.”

“So....” I began after a time, “worship is saying ‘ahhh’ to God.”

“Yes,” Jesus replied. “Worship is what happens when a person enters into and enjoys the relationship with me that they were designed to enjoy. So now, do you see the difference between a creator who creates out of a desire to fill his emptiness and one who creates out of a desire to share his fullness?”

“I think I do,” I replied.

“Then tell me why it’s a sign of sickness for a parent to require worship from a child or a boss from his employees, but it’s okay for me to require worship from you.”

“Because...” I began, “because the parent or boss is trying to have their children or employees inappropriately meet their emotional needs whereas you’re... you’re about meeting my needs.”

“That’s right,” Jesus replied. “I require worship for your sake, not mine.”

Continued tomorrow...

Questions:

- 1) How is worship an “expression of enjoyment”?
- 2) What should spontaneously happen when we enter into God’s presence, aware of all he is and has done for us?
- 3) Is it okay to think in terms of getting your needs met in worship? (More on this tomorrow.)

Prayer:

Father God, press into me the truth of all you are and have for me that worship might spontaneously erupt from my lips as soon as I think of you. Amen.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Monday’s Exercises.]

Pray for the people you know who need emotional healing.

Understanding Worship

An excerpt from
Will There Be Dogs in Heaven?
(part 3)

Continued from yesterday...

"I require worship for your sake, not mine," Jesus replied.

Jesus and I sat in silence for a moment, during which time the scowl must have returned to my face.

"Something isn't sitting right with you, is it?" Jesus asked.

"No," I quickly said, "and it's about the 'required' part. That bothers me, and I guess that's what sounds so... well, questionable."

"Tell me what you think," Jesus said. "Do you think there are times when a good coach must require an athlete to stop and take a drink of water, or when a good boss must insist that their employee take a break from work?"

"Yes, of course," I said, nodding.

"Why?" Jesus asked.

"Well because, in the case of the athlete, the coach may have a better understanding of what the athlete's needs are...." I stopped before finishing the sentence. "I see where this is headed."

"Keep going."

"You're saying that you require worship because I need it, but I don't always know that I need it."

"Yes, and again, the whole thing turns on whether I require worship for your sake or mine," Jesus replied. "A good boss will insist that a hardworking employee take time off. And a good mother will insist that her child take a break from playing outdoors to come in and eat dinner. I require worship because you not only need worship, you need to be reminded that you need worship."

"But it does say that you delight in being worshipped," I noted.

"Of course. I delight to see my children sharing in the experience I've shared with my Father and Spirit for all eternity."

I paused to consider this. "I guess I'm trying to square this with what I've been told. I mean, you're saying that worship is about me getting my needs met whereas I've heard people—some who I really respect—say that worship isn't about me at all. Are they wrong?" I asked.

"Thirst is satisfied by drinking, not by focusing on thirst. Your needs, your deepest needs, are satisfied by entering into and experiencing my presence, not by

focusing on your need.”

“I’m... I’m not following what you mean,” I confessed.

“Those who are thirsty find their satisfaction in the presence of water, not by focusing on their thirst, but by drinking,” Jesus said. “With me so far?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Those who are thirsty for me find their satisfaction in my presence, not by focusing on their thirst, but by worshipping.”

“But then, is being aware of my need wrong?” I asked.

“What do you think?” Jesus asked.

“I think, maybe,” I replied.

Jesus laughed.

“I mean, awareness of my need drives me to get my needs met—and that’s good.”

“Right. Thirst drives one to water.”

“But, once in the presence of water, the point is to drink, not to be thirsty,” I said.

“Yes, exactly. Your need to experience the love and joy of God is fulfilled in his presence, not by experiencing your need, but by experiencing God in worship. So, those who remind you that worship isn’t about you and your needs are right in so far as they are encouraging you to take your eyes off your needs and focus them on the one whose presence satisfies your needs. But they’re wrong if they mean that worship isn’t about getting your needs met or that it’s somehow wrong to enjoy worship or to find it satisfying. To acknowledge your need for worship is to acknowledge that worship is, at least on one level, about getting your needs met.”

Continued tomorrow...

Questions:

- 1) Why does God require worship?
- 2) In what way is worship about you? In what way is worship is not about you?
- 3) Awareness of our need to worship drives us into God’s presence. Where must our focus be for our need to worship to be met?

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, make me aware of my need to worship and help me to seek the fulfillment of my need only in you. Amen.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Tuesday’s Exercises.]

Pray for salvation and/or spiritual breakthrough for friends and family members who need it.

Understanding Worship

An excerpt from
Will There Be Dogs in Heaven?
(part 4)

Continued from yesterday...

“Can I ask one more question about worship?” I asked.

“You can ask as many questions as you like,” Jesus replied.

“Okay, I’m thinking.... I think I understand the part about creating out of a desire to share your fullness as opposed to creating out of neediness, and I see the difference that makes. And I guess the required part also makes sense to me. I mean, I know that I often don’t do what’s good for me even when I know it’s good for me. But there’s something that still bothers me, and I think it has to do with you placing yourself in the center, you know, with you making yourself the center of human existence. Isn’t that, wasn’t that... self-centered?”

“Well, let’s think this through,” Jesus began. “Suppose that when I created, I created just you. So here we are, just you and me. What can I give you?”

I nodded my head. “I guess it’s pretty obvious that if it’s just you and me, you can only give me you. But you could also make stuff and give that to me, right?”

“Yes, of course. And I do that as well, but what could I give you that’s better than myself? And what would the other things be worth apart from my presence?”

“Ultimately nothing,” I replied.

“Nothing,” Jesus said. “The gifts of a father to a son may be great and many, but what are they worth apart from the father’s presence? Which would you choose, to have a good father present and active in your life or to have the gifts of a wealthy but absent father?”

“I guess the answer is obvious,” I said.

“Yes, and when you understand this, you understand that placing myself in the center of human existence wasn’t an act of self-centeredness but of self-giving. I do have other gifts to give, of course, but they are in addition to my presence—apart from my presence they are nothing.”

I looked away from Jesus and back over the parking lot, noticing again the absolute stillness of my surroundings.

“I guess I’m beginning to see how backwards I’ve had it,” I said.

“Tell me,” Jesus challenged.

I hesitated before finally saying, “I’m kind of ashamed to admit that I thought there was something not quite right about you in relationship to worship. Not that I ever put it into words, but I kind of found the whole idea embarrassing.”

“In what way?” Jesus asked.

“In every way. I mean, I was embarrassed that you made creatures to worship you, that you required worship from them, that you delighted in being worshipped, that you designed human existence to be centered around you. It all seemed so wrong.”

“But now?”

“Now I’m embarrassed that I was embarrassed. Now that you’ve explained everything I understand that everything you did is an act of generosity and that I had it all backwards.”

“Having it all backwards is one of the defining characteristics of human nature,” Jesus replied.

“It is?”

“Ever since sin entered into the equation,” Jesus replied. “Ever since its fall into sin, humanity has been inclined to think the worst of me and to settle for that which is less than I am....

Concluded tomorrow...

Questions:

- 1) How is God’s placing himself in the center of our existence an act of self-giving rather than of self-centeredness?
- 2) Have you ever sought God for the things he could give you rather than for the blessing of his presence?
- 3) If a friend were to ask you, “Why did God create creatures to worship him?” how would you respond?

Prayer:

Gracious God, thank you for inviting me to share in all that you have and all that you are. May my worship of you—more and more—reflect a growing awareness of the truth about you and about all that I have in you. Amen.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Wednesday’s Exercises.]

Pray for the specific needs of immediate family members and loved ones.

Understanding Worship

(part 5)

Let's review:

The Persons of the Trinity created humanity out of a desire to share the abundance of love, joy, peace and goodness that flow within and are engendered by the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Worship is the expression of enjoyment that comes from entering into God's presence and enjoying his abundance. Worship is saying 'ahhh' to God. (We'll expand on this definition in the next chapter.)

God requires worship for our sake, not his. (Although he does delight in seeing his children enjoy that which they were created to enjoy.)

Worship is about meeting our needs in the sense that we have a need to worship that only worship can meet. But our need to worship is only met when we focus on God and not on our need. (Just as thirst is satisfied by drinking, not by focusing on thirst.)

God's creating a creature with the capacity to worship isn't an act of self-centeredness, but of self-giving, of generosity.

Questions:

- 1) What was God's motivation for creating humanity with the capacity to worship?
- 2) How is worship like saying 'ahhh' to God?
- 3) Are you aware of any misconceptions you've had about worship? What might they be?

Prayer:

Most generous God, when you created me with the ability to worship, you gave me the greatest possible gift—yourself. Please grow in me the capacity to worship, that I might truly enjoy all you are. Amen.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Thursday's Exercises.]

Pray for government and world leaders—that God would grant them wisdom, courage, knowledge of the truth and genuine faith in him.

Created to Worship

In the preceding chapters, worship was defined as “the expression of enjoyment that comes from entering into God’s presence and sharing with Him the overflowing love and joy that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have experienced from all eternity”. This definition grounds worship in the eternal nature of a God who desires to share himself with his creatures—something necessary if we are to avoid getting worship “all backwards”—but we’ll need an expanded definition for day-to-day (and moment-to-moment) practice. Here’s an expanded definition:

<p>Worship is an expression to God...</p> <p>of enjoyment</p> <p>awe</p> <p>thankfulness</p> <p>appreciation</p> <p>wonder</p> <p>or delight (etc.)</p>	<p>prompted by an experience of...</p> <p>God’s presence or</p> <p>an attribute of God:</p> <p>his goodness</p> <p>generosity</p> <p>grace</p> <p>mercy</p> <p>or artistry (etc.)</p>
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In line with the above definition, here are some examples of worship:

A woman, enjoying a sunset, turns to God and says, “God, you are truly a great artist.”

A man, reading scripture, is amazed at how generous Jesus is. In prayer, he says, “Jesus, I am in awe of your grace. Thank you for all you’ve done for me.”

A child looks into the nighttime sky and says, “God, how did you create something so beautiful?”

A woman, realizing that God has answered her prayer, prays, “God, you have been so good to me. Thank you for your kindness and care.”

Questions:

- 1) In light of the above definition of worship, what is necessary for you to become a more frequent worshiper?

2) What role can scripture play in worship?

Prayer:

Father God, through your Spirit, draw me into a deeper encounter with your Son. Help me to express more deeply the awe and appreciation and wonder that will come as I get to know him better. Amen.

Note: Misconceptions about worship tend to center around the nature of God and our nature as children of God. We will continue to address both of these misconceptions as we move forward.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Friday's Exercises.]

Pray for those in any of the daily categories who have the greatest need.

The Preflight Checklist

(the first item)

In aviation, a preflight checklist is a list of tasks that are so important they must be completed before *every* flight. The flight itself may vary in many significant ways, but the preflight checklist remains the same.

As we move forward, we'll develop something of a spiritual preflight checklist—a list of spiritual essentials, things that are important to do every day.

Up to this point, we've been praying after each session. From now on, we'll also begin each session with a prayer that asks for God's blessing:

Pray: Father God, as I seek a deeper encounter with your Son, speak directly to my heart and mind through your Holy Spirit. Guide my prayers that they might be sincere. May the truth of your word accomplish its purpose in me. Please thwart any attempt by the evil one to interfere in any way with what follows. Amen.

Questions:

- 1) The above prayer contains four sentences. Each sentence asks for something specific. How would you summarize each of the sentences?
- 2) Why do you suppose this prayer is included in the “preflight checklist”?

Concluding Prayer:

(Pray the above prayer.)

(The last line of our first preflight checklist item refers to “the evil one”. More on this tomorrow.)

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Saturday's Exercises.]

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