

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

WEEK # 5

IGNITE!

Re-Discovering the
Christian

Passionate
Life

2 Chronicles contains an incredible story about the power of praising God as the Moabites and Ammonites came to do battle with Israel. The massive forces frightened all of Israel and King Jehoshaphat was scared as well. After approaching God in prayer and worship, the nation set out for the battle the next morning.

Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

*"Give thanks to the LORD,
for his love endures forever."*

As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped.

2 Chronicles 20 (NIV)

Worshiping God can give real victory in our lives. Often when we face great trials and challenges we feel like God has abandoned us, yet here we see that God is often just waiting for us to turn to Him in trust and worship. Often He will move and provide victory while we're still on our way to the confrontation. So praise Him before the battle. Praise Him on your way. Even during some of the battles we face, praise Him. No matter what our challenge, He is worthy of praise and honor and glory.

What battles can you praise Him for today? What victories has He provided for you? (Hint: Every victory is His blessing.)

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

Philippians 3:3 (NIV)

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

Luke 4:8 (NIV)

The most common word for worship in the New Testament is the Greek word -Proskynein. The picture of this word may seem strange in the context we have in worship today, but it's the idea drawn from when a dog will sit by his master's side and lift its head and lick his master's hand. That does not mean that we should think of ourselves as dogs. But the image of sitting at the side of God, and simply lifting our kisses to Him is one that does fit the concept of worship.

Worship is the privilege of coming near to God and just being able to enjoy His presence. To lift our expressions of love to Him so that He will know of our desire to please Him. It may at times be sloppy as we struggle to fully express our gratitude and appreciation for what He has done and is doing in our lives. But God understands even our most feeble attempts.

This may conjure up the time when John tells us about how Mary, Lazarus's sister, just wanted to sit and listen to Jesus and be near Him while Martha worked in the kitchen. When Martha complained, Jesus pointed out that Mary had chosen the greatest path.

What keeps you from sitting with Jesus and spending time with Him? Is being near Jesus the most important thing in your life? How or why is that not demonstrated by how you live?

And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped.

Exodus 4:31 (NIV)

I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live." But you have not listened to me.

Judges 6:10 (NIV)

The word most commonly used in the Old Testament for worship is the Hebrew word—Histahawa. Its core meaning is that of "bowing down." It carries with it the idea of both honor and humility. Bowing is really foreign to the American culture. It requires the physical act of positioning yourself lower than someone else. The Old Testament concept also carries with it the imagery of not bowing from the waist, but from bended knee with our heads to the ground.

Growing up, my home church had the tradition of praying every Sunday night and encouraging everyone to kneel as we prayed. I've noticed as I have gotten older that it has become harder to kneel, and I don't mean just physically. My life mirrors the culture in that kneeling before God has become increasingly difficult. In the self-promoting, self-important world we live in taking a posture that recognizes the importance of someone more than ourselves is not heard of. We live insecure lives that are easily offended and believe that we are all equal, ignoring that though we may be created equal in God's eyes, we are never His equal.

How can we ever fully worship when we struggle to even lower ourselves for a few moments of prayer? God gives grace to the humble and when we encounter God we cannot help but be humbled. In many cases there should be humiliation due to our sins.

Who do you bow to in your heart? Who or what is it that controls your calendar, schedule, budget, and time? What do you humble yourself before?

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:19-24 (NIV)

An idea that causes great consternation today is, what is it to worship in “spirit and in truth”? The ideas and definitions are plentiful and I will not take the time to share many of them with you. Instead I would like to view this in the context. Jesus is having an improbable conversation with a Samaritan woman and the issue of the proper place to worship comes up. Although loaded with a wide array of applications, the contextual point Jesus is making is worship is not about where you are. For a culture that had come to limit their place of worship to a temple on a mountain, the idea that God can be worshiped anywhere is a strong departure from the standard concept of worship.

The point is that people can worship, not on a mountain or Jerusalem, but wherever they are. Jesus ushers in a new covenant, written not on stone, but on our hearts and so too has our worship moved from the outward place to the inward reality. Spiritual worship is truthful, flowing from the very core of our beings and unconfined by walls and destinations. Everywhere we go is a place of worship.

Is there somewhere you go where you can't worship God? Why do you go there? Why do some places seem more “holy” in our minds than others?

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, “Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him.” Matthew 2:1-2 (MSG)

This text is of course from the account of the Wise Men who came to Israel looking for the new King of the Jews who had been born as evidenced in the star that they had seen in the skies. So they had loaded up their things and began a pilgrimage to enable them to come and worship the One that the heavens themselves talked about.

There are two key elements to the worship that the Wise Men came to bring: 1) It was a worship that had been long anticipated; 2) It was a worship that came with a desire to bring honor and gifts.

It is fairly well-attested to in scripture that Jesus was probably around two years of age when the Wise Men came to actually see him face to face, which meant their journey had taken two years to get to Bethlehem. Yet even though there was a great distance, the time was considered to be well spent if it meant they would be able to see the star-promised child. To prepare for this encounter they brought gifts that demonstrated their appreciation for an honored child, but also ones that had great value.

These two elements of their worship can teach us something about our worship. In a day and age when convenience is king, worship calls us to turn away from convenience and invest ourselves and our treasures in the One who is worthy of all we have. It is impossible to worship without giving something of yourself. God wants us to give with joy.

How is your generosity in worship? Promoted and enthused by joy? Willing to give and work for the privilege of worshipping the true God?

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

Romans 12:1 (NLT)

This passage presents an interesting combination of body and spirit in worship. We are directed to offer our bodies as sacrifices as spiritual worship. So often we hear about “being spiritual” or becoming “more spiritual” in the world today. Some would even say that they have no interest in spiritual things. But by the very nature that God has made in us, we are a unique creation that marries spirit with physical.

So too should our worship be. We cannot separate our lives into “real” and “spirit,” or “secular” and “sacred.” Just as Jesus called us to live out the greatest command of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, so too should our worship integrate those same dimensions into our honoring God. The surrender of your body; all you do, all you say, all you eat, and all you touch is an act of worship to God. It is an entrusting to the Lord your life.

This sacrifice is one of vibrancy and life, as well as purity and separation. God wants us to be living, not dour, sour, lifeless automatons that would seem soulless by their lack of energy and life. Remember that the life God has called us to live sacrificially is one of abundance and uniqueness in its fullness. A sacrificed life is one lived with passion and purpose. With a sense of depth due to our understanding of the realities of life and the universe around us. It is due in large part because of our understanding that our lives are separated from the world's. Our whole life becomes sacred to allow every bit of it to flow like rivers to the ocean of God's love and grace.

What are you willing to die for?

What are you living for?

How should you worship? This question has the volatility of nitroglycerin in the back of a pickup on an old country road. Usually our answer is shaped and formed by the experience we have had in church from a young age or the images we are exposed to in our seeking God. But the question is one that the Bible speaks to in many ways. Here is but a small list of some of the Bible's suggestions for how to worship.

Shouting—Psalm 35:27; 149:6 (MSG)

Talking about God—Psalm 9:1; 145:10; 34:1; 40:10

Clapping, shouting, singing— Psalm 47:1

Declaring the Name of God—Psalm 22:22; 35:18

Lifting Hands—Psalm 28:2; 88:9; 143:6; 134:2; 63:4

Kneeling—Psalm 95:6; 138:2

Falling Prostrate—1 Kings 18:38-39 (20 times the Bible speaks of Abraham, disciples, and others doing this)

Standing—Psalm 119:120

Dancing—Psalm 150:4; 30:11; 149:3

Leaping—Luke 6:23

Singing—Psalm 146:2; 147:1, 7, 149:1

Instrumental music—147:7; 149:3; 150:3-5

So which one is right?

Perhaps a better question would be—“which ones have you tried?” At the core of this is the fact that the expression should fit the attitude of the heart toward God. There may be times that we have limited our ability to discover new depths of understanding because we have limited our expressions.

Your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to try a new mode of expression this week. “Try it...you might like it.”

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