

Majesty

Experiencing Authentic Worship

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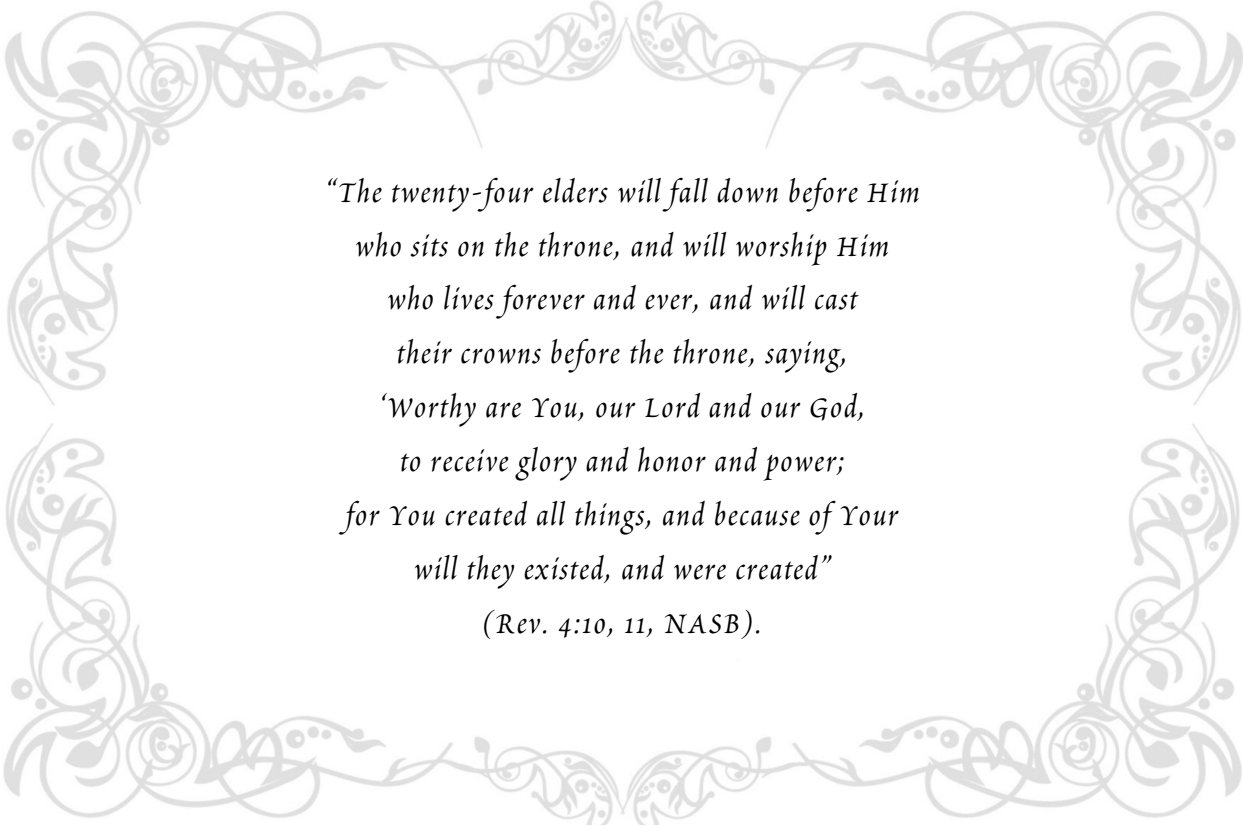
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DEDICATION

*To Denise,
my beloved wife.
Your worship experience is
inspiring and contagious.*

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*“The twenty-four elders will fall down before Him
who sits on the throne, and will worship Him
who lives forever and ever, and will cast
their crowns before the throne, saying,
‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God,
to receive glory and honor and power;
for You created all things, and because of Your
will they existed, and were created”
(Rev. 4:10, 11, NASB).*

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WORSHIP

The Heartbeat of the Believer

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

It was a cold winter evening in the Northwest. About 200 people had assembled for our church vision night. God had blessed our congregation in an awesome way, as more than 100 people had joined our church that year. Many great and wonderful things had happened in our lives, community, and congregation. The level of excitement was high. You could feel joy and warmth everywhere.

I started my devotional thought by saying that we were here to worship and to praise the Lord for all the wonderful things that He had done. Then I continued by asking the question “What is worship?”



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Some thought that listening to a sermon was worship, while others decided that evangelism was worship. Some equated it with revival, and others suggested that believing or teaching the truth was worship. Of course, some believed that worship was about praise and adoration. Many expressed the opinion that offering, fellowship, and even prayer were preliminaries to worship, but not the real worship itself. No one mentioned that worship was about God, about making a commitment to Him and giving Him worth, honor, glory, and devotion.

Almost everyone put the emphasis on what happens up front on Sabbath morning, forgetting that worship is about life and what takes place inside of us every moment of every day.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE OF WORSHIP?

It seems to me that very few Christians know much about true worship. Most Christians in most churches have little knowledge of worship and even less of an experience in actual worship of God. We go to church, but we don't worship. We sing songs, but we don't worship. And we listen to sermons, but we don't worship. All of these things are elements of worship, but they are not worship. You can do all of them and yet have truly failed to worship God. We Christians often mistake the means of worship for worship itself.

Worship, though many believe this, is not about us being in church during the 11:00 service on Sabbath morning. No, worship is not about us showing up, but about God showing up and breaking through inside of us and bringing His presence and grace to us. It is about being caught up in the majesty and wonder and awe of God. At its core, worship is about being so moved by the presence of God that we kneel down in obedience and devotion and then rise up in holy lives filled with service and excitement for what God has done and is doing for us.

After that discussion about worship, I immediately felt the need for a comprehensive program of education to explain to the congregation its meaning and essential elements. I believed that proper understanding of worship and the implementation of meaningful worship services would create excitement and enhance spirituality. And the results were amazing. The more I explained to the congregation the significance of worship, the more satisfaction I found among the members and the more they were in-



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clined to do ministry and evangelism. When we enter into an authentic experience with our awesome God, we are more likely to live His will in the world and serve Him with love and enthusiasm.

I also believe there is a strong connection between personal worship and congregational worship. One leads to the other. If one is weak, the other will also eventually be weak. However, if one is strong, it will inevitably make the other strong.

I believe that as you read this book your understanding of worship will deepen, heightening its experience for you.

WHY AUTHENTIC WORSHIP?

Worship is the single most important event in the life of the Christian, for everything in Christianity centers on worship. The health and vitality of the believer rises and falls on the quality of his or her worship experience. Worship, according to Revelation 14:6-12, is the commemoration of Creation and the celebration of the gospel. It is the believer's response to the mercy and goodness of God through the act of adoration, reverence, thanksgiving, obedience, and submission.

Christians worship because of what God has done, is doing, and will do through His Son, Jesus Christ, and through His Spirit. The chief aim of Christian worship is to glorify God, to praise Him, and to thank Him—to enter into a definite experience with Him. Therefore, worship is one of the most important activities of the believer and the church. If the church fails in its worship, it will also stumble in its mission and degenerate into nothing but a social club with some spiritual bent.

In order to improve our spiritual activities and mission, we must have a proper understanding of worship. Without authentic worship, spiritual life would soon weaken and disintegrate. There can be no possibility for us as believers of being healthy and strong spiritually without worship.

Recognizing, then, that Christian worship is the essential issue in the life of the Christian believer and that an understanding of it is long overdue, the following chapters will attempt to come to grips with the concept of worship.

The purpose of this book is to introduce and explain the scriptural principles of Christian worship. I believe that the more we comprehend worship and the significance of its elements, the more worship will be-



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come meaningful and eventually lead to a higher commitment to Jesus and to His ministry and mission.

THE LIFE YOU HAVE ALWAYS WANTED

The Christian life centers on worship. However, a failure to grasp the proper meaning of worship leads to frustration, confusion, and decline in spirituality. There is widespread ignorance about its true significance and basic elements (i.e., Scripture, preaching, prayer, praise, offering, and fellowship), and the means of attaining the blessing of rich, rewarding, authentic worship.

It is, therefore, not surprising that multitudes of people, both young and old, who in childhood worshipped at home and regularly attended church, have turned away from the Lord and the church, expressing their loss of interest and their failure to find meaning and relevance in personal as well as corporate worship.

Understanding and experiencing worship is essential for the following reasons:

First, true worship takes place when the individual believer seeks the Lord with all his or her heart, mind, soul, passion, and energy. Jeremiah declares, “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,” declares the Lord” (Jer. 29:11-14, NASB).

Such passion for God will help us enter His presence and have an encounter that will change us and bring us into a higher level of commitment and love for Him. The believer must worship not so much to have his or her needs met, but to seek God more than life itself. The most common mistake that Christians make in worship today is seeking an experience rather than God Himself.

Unfortunately, Christians limit their worship to one hour each week. And when they come to that service, they often do so just to observe and be entertained. I have been at church services that opened with the following statement: “We want you to sit back, relax, and enjoy the program we have prepared for you.”

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We have reversed the whole concept of worship because we think that the pastor and worship leaders are the entertainers and we are the audience. But in true worship we are the performers, the pastors and worship leaders are the directors, and God is the audience. Because our concept of worship is backwards, we want to know what's in it for us. If we are truly going to worship, we must come to the realization that worship is not for us, but for God. Because God desires our worship, we must learn how to worship Him.

If we attempt to meet our needs, we will end up frustrated, disappointed, and dissatisfied, for we cannot fully satisfy them. But if we seek to meet God, it will fulfill our needs, because He is what our souls really desire.

Second, true worship focuses on God—the point at which many of us make our mistake. We assume that worship focuses on us. Many times I've heard people talk about how they are struggling in their worship life because they aren't being fed. Have you ever heard anyone say that? "I'm not being fed. I'm not getting anything out of worship. I'm not being nurtured by worship. I don't get a blessing out of worship." I want to see people being concerned about whether or not *God* is enjoying worship. And until He gets something out of our worship, we never will. Until our worship blesses Him, we won't be blessed.

All too often we treat worship as something that's supposed to entertain us. But it isn't. What is most important is that God enjoys the worship experience. We are here to worship and bless *Him*.

Isaiah 6:1-6 describes how the prophet went to the Temple in which he "saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (verse 1, NIV). It is God's presence that fills the worship. True worship always focuses on Him.

Third, true worship always begins with a recognition of divine holiness. The 24 elders in Revelation 4:10, 11 worshipped God continually when they became aware of His power and character. We've lost something of that in our worship services. In recent years theology and worship have emphasized the personal nature, love, and joy of God to such a degree that for some reason we've forgotten that He is also an awesome deity. In the process we have almost transformed Him into a "little buddy." As a result we have forgotten that God is such an awesome and holy being that to be in His presence is to be filled with awe and wonder.



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When Moses sensed God's presence in the burning bush, he became afraid. As Jacob had his dream of the ladder to heaven, he declared, "Surely the Lord is present and I didn't know it" (see Gen. 28:16). And the Bible says that awe swept over him. Time and again, when people become aware of the divine presence, the Bible describes the experience as one filled with awe, reverence, and even fear (see Heb. 12:28).

Why do we worship God? Because He is holy, and His holiness demands our attention.

Fourth, true worship is our *attributing worth to God*. In Scripture worship refers to the response of God's people to the wonder of who He is. For example, in Romans 12:1 Paul writes, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—*this is your spiritual act of worship*" (NIV). But most frequently when the Bible uses the word "worship" it has to do with praising God—verbally attributing worth to Him. How often do you attribute worth to God in your life, in your giving, in your ministry, and in your personal and community worship?

Fifth, true worship also helps us to understand ourselves and our shortcomings and to seek God's forgiveness. In Isaiah 6 the heavenly beings sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3, NIV). And immediately the prophet cries out, "Woe to me!" (verse 5, NIV). And he speaks of his own sinfulness.

We cannot come into the presence of God without becoming aware of both God's holiness and our own ungodliness.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, said, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NIV). It is impossible to approach His presence without recognizing our own shortcomings and sins.

When Isaiah enters the Temple and senses God's holiness, it compels him to acknowledge his own sinfulness and to confess his sins. That confession leads to the free forgiveness of sins. In the book of Isaiah a heavenly being symbolically takes a hot coal and touches the lips of the prophet as a gesture that declares his sins are forgiven.

First John 1:8, 9 declares: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (NKJV).

Again, why do we worship? One reason is to be able to experience



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that forgiveness. We need to hear the same message the prophet Isaiah did: “Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for” (Isa. 6:7, NIV).

Sixth, true worship will always result in service. Another reason we come to worship is so that our lives will be different. And the difference should be in terms of transformation and service. Worship at its best always motivates the worshipper to live a holy and righteous life filled with service, ministry, and blessings.

In Matthew 4:10 “worship” and “service” are essentially the same word. Worship and service go hand in hand. One cannot have worship without service automatically following.

As the prophet Isaiah is in the Temple to worship he hears angels singing, “Holy, holy, holy.” It moves him to confess his sins, and he immediately receives assurance of his pardon. Then God asks, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8, NIV). And what follows then is the service, the ministry, the reaching out to others. Isaiah declares, “Here am I. Send me!” (verse 8). True worship will always result in service. We cannot enter into the worship of the Almighty without afterward departing into the world to serve. Worship challenges us to do something to make a difference in the world.

The real question is What is God calling you to do this week? What person in your life must you love a little more? Which people in your community do you need to reach out to a little harder?

What God summons us to do from one week to the next may change, but may our response always be that of Isaiah’s: “Here I am, Lord, send me.”

Therefore, the stronger that our grasp becomes on the deeper meanings of Christian worship, the more we enter into a rehearsal of the drama of our salvation. It is imperative that we seek an intelligent understanding of what Christian worship is. Only then will we have a more fulfilling Christian experience.

GOD’S GREATEST DESIRE IS TO BE WITH US

I believe that a strong connection exists between feeling the presence of God and authentic worship. When Christ is present, worship comes alive. Going to church is no longer just a self-centered act—to see what we’ll get out of a service. Formality without meaning will then cease as we stop going through the motions of religious experience without any real power. The



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“tradition” of singing hymns—words and melodies—without a companion inward change will disappear. As we feel the presence of God, we will have the worship experience of our lives—rich, and deep, and meaningful.

I remind you that our Lord *is* truly present in us in our lives and in His church Sabbath after Sabbath. And what does that say about our worship practices? It affirms for us that when we worship we are having an audience with the King of the whole universe.

If the president of the United States or the queen of England were special guests in our churches, people would hurry to fill the pews. So why don't we do the same when our Lord and Master is the honored guest?

Human beings have a longing that I believe stretches as far back as the paradise of Eden. It is the desire to experience once again the wonder of the divine presence.

This intimacy first manifested itself in the garden. But then Adam and Eve sinned, and the Bible records that instead of continuing to enjoy the divine closeness of their Lord, “The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of God” (Gen. 3:8, NASB). From that initial point one can almost read Scripture as an account of repeated attempts by both the Creator and His creatures to restore the cherished relationship known at the start of human history.

This presence of the Lord is an important theme throughout the Bible. In Exodus 33:14 God promised Moses, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (NIV). The Lord had already fulfilled the divine promise in a supernatural way: “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light” (Ex. 13:21, NKJV). God also displayed His unique presence in the tabernacle (“Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” [Ex. 40:34, NIV]) and later in the Temple (“When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple” [2 Chron. 7:1, NIV]).

On a more personal level, the psalmist declared, “In thy presence is fulness of joy!” (Ps. 16:11). What a great truth we find contained in David's simple statement.

Yet God, in His love, was preparing to make His presence known to His people in a far more personal way than He ever had before.