



## Intimacy Is Nourished by Worship

by J. Oswald Sanders

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*What is worship? Worship is to feel in your heart and express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love in the presence of that most ancient Mystery, that Majesty which philosophers call the First Cause, but which we call Our Father Which Art in Heaven.<sup>1</sup>*

—A. W. Tozer



J. Oswald Sanders

In the act of worship, God communicates His presence to His people. That is borne out by the experience of Dr. R.A. Torrey, who girdled the globe with his revival-kindling evangelistic missions. He testified that a transformation came into his experience when he learned not only to give thanks and make petition, but also to worship—asking nothing from God, occupied and satisfied with Him alone. In that new experience, he realized a new intimacy with God.

As His disciples heard the Master pray, they could not help but discern the depth of intimacy that existed between Him and His Father. Aspiration after a similar experience was kindled in their hearts, and they asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). He gladly responded, for was not this the very road along which He had been leading them?

In replying to their request, Jesus said, “When you pray, say: ‘Father’ (Luke 11:2, italics added). A sense of the true fatherhood of God in all the richness of that relationship cannot but kindle worship—the loving ascription of praise to God for all that He is, both in His person and providence.

Jesus thus impressed upon His students the important principle that in prayer God must occupy the supreme place, not we ourselves, or even our urgent needs. What a wealth of meaning was compressed into that single word, “Father,” as it fell from the lips of Jesus. If God is not accorded the chief place in our prayer life, our prayers will be tepid and pallid. It is significant that in the pattern prayer, it is half com-

pleted before Jesus instructed them to mention their own personal needs. When God is given His rightful place, faith will be stimulated.

The idea of worship is endemic in the human race, for man is essentially a worshiping being. But the term as commonly used seldom conveys its true scriptural content. Its old English form, “worthship,” provides an interesting sidelight on its meaning. It implies worthiness on the part of the one who receives it.

The ascription of praise to the Lamb in the midst of the throne in Revelation 5:12-14 is an example of the purest worship:

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever. And the elders fell down and worshiped.

The word “worship” derives from a word meaning “to prostrate oneself, to bow down.” It is used of a dog fawning before its master. As we use it, it is “the act of paying reverence and honor to God.” When we pray, “Hallowed be Thy name,” we are worshipping Him. It conjures up in our minds all that that name connotes.

When God revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, it was through His name: “And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him.... Then the LORD...proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished’ (Exod. 34:5-7).

But it is in the area of worship that many evangelicals are most deficient, as John R. W. Stott writes.

We evangelicals do not know much about worship. Evangelism is our specialty, not worship. We have little sense of the greatness of Almighty God. We tend to be cocky, flippant, and proud. And our worship

services are often ill-prepared, slovenly, mechanical, perfunctory and dull. . . . Much of our public worship is ritual without reality, form without power, religion without God.<sup>2</sup>

Endless material for worship is enshrined in divine revelation, for worship is simply the adoring contemplation of God as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in His Son and in the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms, the inspired book of prayer.

Few have mastered the art of worship as did F.W. Faber. To read some of his hymns and poems is a rare experience of worship.

How wonderful, how beautiful  
The sight of Thee must be,  
Thine endless wisdom, boundless power  
And awful purity.  
O how I fear Thee, living God,  
With deepest, tenderest fears,  
And worship Thee with trembling hope  
And penitential tears.

Hear him again as he is lost in adoration:

Only to sit and think of God,  
Oh, what joy it is!  
To think the thought, to breathe the Name,  
Earth has no higher bliss!

Father of Jesus, love's Reward,  
What rapture will it be,  
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie  
And gaze, and gaze on Thee.

### Worship and Love

Worship flows from love. Where love is meager, worship will be scant. Where love is deep, worship will overflow. As Paul wrote his letters, his contemplation of the love and glory of God would spontaneously cause his heart to overflow in worship and doxology.

But there can be an element of selfishness even in love. True, we should worship God for the great things He has done for us, but our worship reaches a much higher level when we worship Him simply and solely for what He is, for the excellences and perfections of His being.

Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, said, "I have known men who came to God for nothing else but just to come to Him, they so loved Him. They scorned to soil Him and themselves with any other errand than just purely to be alone with Him in His presence." We might say with some justification that that is a little extreme, but it betokens an intimacy with God and

desire for fellowship with Him that we might well covet.

Worship is the loving ascription of praise to God, for what He is in Himself and in His providential dealings. It is the bowing of our innermost spirit before Him in deepest humility and reverence.

The essence of worship is illustrated in the return of Scipio Africanus from the conquest of his enemies. As he went, he scattered the largess of the victor to the crowds that lined the way. Some were stirred to gratitude by his liberality; some because he had rolled away from their homes the fear of the invading army; still others, forgetful of their personal benefits, praised the qualities of the victor—his courage, resourcefulness, liberality. It was in that last group that the highest element of worship was present.

### *Worship Can Be Wordless*

David adjured his soul: "My soul, wait in silence for God only" (Psalm 62:5). The deepest feelings often cannot find adequate expression in words. Between intimate friends there can be comfortable silences. There are times when words are unnecessary, or even an intrusion. So in our communication with God. Sometimes we are awed into silence in the presence of the Eternal.

### *A Single Word Can Enshrine a Wealth of Worship*

When the disconsolate Mary was weeping outside the empty tomb, she turned and saw Jesus but did not recognize Him until "Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!'" (John 20:16) In that single word was compressed all the passionate love and reverent worship of a devoted friend and follower.

### How Worship May Be Stimulated

Intimacy with God will inevitably fan the flame of desire to know Him better, so that we may worship Him more worthily. How can we stimulate and gratify that desire?

God has granted a glorious, although only partial, revelation of Himself in the wonders of His creation. "The heavens are telling of the glory of God;" wrote David. "And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). From His inconceivably vast universe, we can learn something of His majesty, infinite power and wisdom, beauty and orderliness.

The heavens declare Thy glory, Lord,  
In every star Thy wisdom shines;  
But when our eyes behold Thy Word,  
We read Thy name in fairer lines.

Isaac Watts

But the heavens do not declare the mercy and love of God. Only in the face of Jesus Christ do we see the full blaze of the divine glory, for “it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him” (Col. 1:19). No worship that ignores Christ is acceptable to God, for it is only through Him that we can know and have access to the Father.

In Thee most perfectly expressed,  
The Father’s glories shine,  
Of the full deity possessed,  
Eternally divine.  
Worthy, O Lamb of God art Thou,  
That every knee to Thee should bow.

Josiah Conder

The question then arises: How can I get to know better and more intimately the Christ who reveals the Father? Primarily through the Scriptures as they are illuminated by the inspiring Holy Spirit. They are rich with material to feed and stimulate worship and adoration. The Scriptures are the only tangible way of knowing Him, as Jesus Himself indicated: “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me” (John 5:39).

In the Bible, we have the full and adequate revelation of the vast scope of the divine nature. Great tracts of truth await our exploration. Great themes—God’s sovereignty, truth, holiness, wisdom, love, faithfulness, patience, mercy—illuminated and made relevant to us by the Holy Spirit, will feed the flame of our worship.

The devotional use of a good hymn book, especially the sections that deal with the Person and work of the members of the Trinity, will prove a great aid to a deeper, more intimate knowledge of God. Not all of us find it easy to express our deepest feelings or to utter our love to God. When we are in the place of prayer, we are painfully conscious of the poverty of our thoughts of God and the paucity of words in which to express them. God has given the church gifted hymn writers to help His less gifted children pour out their worship and praise, and we can take their words and make them our own. Many of the church’s great hymns are the nearest thing to divine inspiration.

We should, however, beware of conceiving of worship as being confined solely to the realm of thought, for in Scripture it is linked with service. “You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only,” were our Lord’s words to Satan (Matt. 4:10). We should not separate what God has joined. Worship is no substitute for service, nor is service a substitute for wor-

ship. But true worship must always be expressed in loving service.

## Notes

1. D. J. Fant, *A.W. Tozer* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 1964), p. 90.

2. John R. W. Stott, “Worship,” *Christianity Today*, March 1979, p. 37.

*A native of New Zealand, the late J. Oswald Sanders (1902-1992) was a consulting director for Overseas Missionary Fellowship, the organization founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865. He preached and taught in conferences in many countries and wrote over 40 books on the Christian life, including The Incomparable Christ, Satan Is No Myth, and In Pursuit of Maturity*

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