

LEADERS NOTES
LIVING BEYOND THIS LIFE - WORSHIP PART XI
“ENCOUNTERING GOD”
AUGUST 2-3, 2008

How does worship allow us to encounter God? In what ways have you encountered God?

Worship occurs when we submit ourselves to God and lift Him up/glorify Him in our actions, words, and thoughts. When we engage in worship, we open up our minds and hearts to God’s presence and influence. Only in a position of submission and humility can we engage in the deepest communion with God. During worship, we encounter God’s presence, thoughts, and heart. This type of communion (co-union) is a uniting of our heart and mind to God’s. We can encounter God in many different ways during worship – we might feel His presence or the weight of His glory, sense His direction or hear His heart for us, have a vision of His encounter with us, be moved in different gifts of the Spirit, gain revelation into His Word, heart, or will, be moved physically (some have fallen to the ground or been moved to dance, for example), or many other individual encounters with God.

Read Psalm 91:1-4. What does it mean to dwell in the house of the Almighty? How can we invite God’s presence through our worship? What hinders us from encountering God during worship? How can we respond to times of “dry” worship?

Psalm 91 is a Messianic Psalm – a psalm prophesying about Jesus Christ. Verse 1 talks about dwelling/abiding in the shelter of the Most High. Jesus knew what it meant to dwell in the presence of God – He remained in God’s presence continually – we see Him remaining with God even during the difficulties of forty days in the desert, awaiting His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, and being beaten and mocked on the cross. Jesus sought and received God’s refuge and strength in the Garden as the Psalmist describes in verse 2. Verse 4 describes God as covering us with His wings. This is a picture of God caring deeply for us and taking care of us, protecting, and comforting us much like a mother bird protects her young. Matthew 23:37 refers to God’s desire to gather us under His wings to protect and care for us, but we weren’t willing. In other words, God does not force His protection over us; instead, He invites us to dwell in His presence and shelter, but we have to choose to *stay* there. “Shall abide” or “dwell” in Psalm 91 describes a *constant* residence, not a place we just visit or run to when we need God.

Psalm 63:6-8 shows the result of abiding in God’s shelter as joy and security. Why wouldn’t we want to remain in His presence? Too often, we get distracted and tempted by the world outside of God’s presence and convince ourselves that we will be able to dabble in the world without really leaving God’s presence (Galatians 4:9). Soon, however, we find ourselves farther and farther away from God. Once we have been away from God’s presence, we begin to forget all of His benefits and begin to rely on ourselves or other things to bring us security and joy. Eventually, we realize that nothing can satisfy us like God’s presence. The Psalmist, in Psalm 73:25-28, discovered this truth as he declares, “Whom have I in heaven {but Thee} And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; Thou hast destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee. But as for me, the *nearness* of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works.”

When we dwell in God’s presence, God gives us strength, peace, joy, and protection. In the New Testament, we also learn that Christ dwells in us when we give Him residence in our hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17). We also learn that the Holy Spirit dwells in us and gives us guidance, conviction, understanding, gifts, abilities, and knowledge to do God’s will, and direct connection with God (Romans 8:9-17). The Holy Spirit also gives us the ability to build an intimate relationship with God (Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:6-7).

Ephesians 3:14-21 shows us how to encounter God in worship.

Vs. 14 – We need to submit to God and humble our hearts in order to be open to His presence; recognizing our relationship to God as our Father by giving Him authority over our lives.

Vs. 15 – We need to recognize that our lives derive from God – He gave us life and sustains us.

Vs. 16 – We need to depend on God and ask Him for strength; ask Him to empower us through His Spirit to live as Kingdom heirs.

Vs. 17 – Believe in Christ and put your trust in His Word and ways so that He can transform you and cause your faith to grow deeper and stronger in His love.

- Vs. 18 – As we allow Christ to renew our minds and the Holy Spirit to empower us, we begin to grow in our experiential understanding of the love that Christ has for us.
- Vs. 19 – We can only comprehend Christ’s love for us through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. As we experience Christ’s love, we are filled with His presence and joy.
- Vs. 20 – Stretch your faith to believe God for more than you can imagine in human terms. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to live out His plan for you as you worship Him with your life.
- Vs. 21 – Give God all the glory and praise for what He has done and what He is going to do.

While encountering God in worship is life-giving and life-changing, we often experience hindrances to encountering God in worship for a variety of reasons. Hebrews 10:20-22 says that we should draw near to God in order to have our guilty conscience purified. Sometimes, however, we don’t feel safe to approach God or free to surrender to Him. At other times we have already been forgiven for something, but the enemy tries to bring it back to mind to make us feel unworthy to worship God, fellowship with Him and approach Him. However, we have to remember in these times that drawing near to God cleanses us from our sin.

We are also hindered in worshipping God when we have a false view of God or of ourselves. If we think incorrectly about God, we may not want to worship Him – if in our deepest heart, we think God has caused us harm or that He doesn’t really care for our every concern, then we misrepresent God’s character to our heart and our heart is not fully responsive to worshipping God. Conversely, if we think incorrectly about who we are in Christ, we may think we are not worthy to be in God’s presence. We may think that our sins and flaws have made us unable to be accepted by God (Since humans tend to reject us for our sins and flaws, why wouldn’t God?). However, God is not like humans – He loved us while we were still sinners; He even loved us to the point of death on a cross (Romans 5:8).

Unforgiveness and unconfessed sin also hinder us from worshipping God in spirit and in truth. How can we honestly confess to God thanks for His forgiveness when we have not forgiven someone else (Matthew 6:14-15)! Likewise, we can’t confess to God that we love Him and give our lives to Him when we haven’t dealt properly with our sin. We need to be honest with God about our sins so that we can enter into His presence and offer up our lives as a holy sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

Pride (1 Corinthians 1:29) and focusing on ourselves, others, or our problems may also hinder us from worshipping God. When pride is manifesting in our lives, we don’t want to give our whole lives or our rights up to God. Worshipping God involves honoring Him – when we honor someone else, we have to bow lower than they are. This can only be done with a humble heart. Also, it’s difficult to focus on God’s amazing grace while we are focusing on ourselves or our neighbor’s singing voice.

Many people are hindered by a particular way of worshipping or style of worship. Some people don’t like getting out of their comfort zones, so when others worship God in a way with which they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable, they allow their minds to wander from God to other worshippers. We need to ask God to help us be single-minded when we worship – see only Him (Psalm 73:25). Just because someone doesn’t worship the way we think they should, that should not hinder us from worshipping God in the way He has led us to.

Dry worship occurs when we enter into a time of worshipping God, but we don’t *feel* God’s presence. This can happen for many reasons, other than because we have unconfessed sin in our lives. Sometimes it is for no other reason than because God wants us to press in deeper in our walk with Him – if He is always easy to find, we will stop seeking Him and fail to appreciate His presence. Alternately, God may know that a desert experience will deepen the roots of our faith in a way that cannot occur any other way. He may need to prepare us for a time of testing or He may be preparing us for a special blessing, but we need to be humbled before we receive it. Whatever the reason, we need to dig deep during dry times and continue to press through to the presence of God until He shows up. Claim His promise that when we draw near to Him, He will draw near to you (James 4:8). Hold on to His promise that He will make a way in the desert (Isaiah 41:19-20).

How can we give thanks sacrificially to God? How can you position yourself to encounter God this week?

Giving thanks sacrificially can take place in many different ways – the sacrifice depends on what God is calling us to surrender and give to Him. It might be our time, energy, career, relationships, money, or possessions. We have to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and respond in faith and obedience when He prompts us to give thanks His way. We position ourselves to encounter God when we recognize that we need God and are willing to let Him have His way in our lives. Yielding our heart, mind, and will to God allows Him to meet us in deeper and more powerful ways than we could ever imagine.