Living Every Moment in the Wonder of Worship

Worship as a Lifestyle
by David Jeremiah

Our preceding century began with predictions of a future utopia just around the corner. The victories of science and industry would surely deliver new prosperity, new capabilities, and new answers to old problems. Even the First World War was labeled “The War to End All Wars” and popularly seen as a more civilized world’s final conflict. The twentieth century arrived with the marvel of the light bulb, but it left with the explosion of mass destruction.

Somewhere along the way, we discovered that utopia is elusive. Wars became more ghastly; technology was turned not just to cures, but to new, man-created crises. The transitional moment between the “Century of Progress” and whatever lies in the new millennium came on September 11, 2001. Two of the world’s most magnificent towers, symbols of sophistication and free world commerce, were savaged by the forces of primitive hatred. As we watched images of people leaping to their deaths and heard of the thousands who perished in collapsing steel and mortar, we felt anything but wonder. We were chilled by horror and dread beyond anything we might have considered before. We wondered if we could ever live again without looking over our shoulders.

Many of us live in cities where sunsets and mountain horizons have become distant memories. The majestic stars are blocked out by the smoky mists of industry. Just as our capabilities have grown exponentially, our capacity for wonder seems to have withered. A century ago, G. K. Chesterton wrote, “The world is not lacking in wonders, but in a sense of wonder.”

Before we can say anything about worship, we must come to grips with this idea of wonder. For worship can never be the sole work of the rational mind. It can’t be drawn up on paper or measured out by charts. Worship and wonder, which are so closely connected, are all about coming to the end of our measurements. In the presence of Almighty God, as the apostle John discovered, the sense of wonder comes naturally and leaves us changed. How could we respond any other way? But without the capability of awe, where we stand at the edge of ourselves and gaze beyond, we will never come into His presence.

Experience vs. Event

Since the days of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, worship has walked a tightrope between lifestyle and liturgy. When God walked in the Garden with His first children in the cool of the day, Adam and Eve worshiped Him as we should—without interruption. The Creator and His creatures experienced a continual, ongoing exchange of provision and praise. God provided everything Adam and Eve needed, and they responded with praise—with gratitude, reverence, honor, submission, and holy fear.

Yet the experience of worship was soon transformed into an event. Adam and Eve sinned, their state of worship was interrupted, and they were expelled from God’s presence. The next thing we see is their sons engaged in an act of worship—the bringing of offerings to the Lord. Instead of worship being the uninterrupted experience of man, sin necessitated the scheduling of worship to a time and a place (Genesis 4:3-4).

Appointed vs. Perpetual

Reading the elaborate and detailed plans God gave to Israel by which they were to worship in the Tabernacle illustrates the legitimacy of appointed times and places of worship. And yet as a backdrop to the appointed times of worship were the perpetual acts of worship which went on before the Lord day and night. Incense was to be burned morning and night in the Holy Place as a “perpetual offering before the LORD throughout your generations” (Exodus 30:8). The fire on the altar was to burn continuously, never to go out (Leviticus 6:12). And the showbread (bread of
the Presence) was kept in the Holy Place all week and renewed each Sabbath (Leviticus 24:5-9).

But when we get to the New Testament, we find something different. Christians are the new temple and priests of God (1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 2:5, 9). Like the priesthood of old, we are to worship at appointed times as well as to worship perpetually. And I probably don’t need to tell you which one we do best. Our calendar-controlled world gives us every reason to schedule worship right along with piano lessons, golf dates, business lunches, family recreation night, and a host of other weekly activities. But we need help in learning to worship God continually.

On Tuesday, August 8, 1738, John Wesley was visiting Herrnhut, the settlement of Moravian refugees on the estate of the German count, Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. That day, a funeral for a Moravian child was being held, and Wesley followed the procession to the burial plot. At the end of the service, Wesley came alongside the father (“a plain man, a tailor by trade”) as he stood looking at the grave of his child. “How do you find yourself?” Wesley asked him. “Praised be the Lord, never better,” the somber father answered. “God has taken the soul of my child to Himself. I have seen, according to my desire, his body committed to holy ground. And I know that when it is raised again, both he and I shall be ever with the Lord.”

If that ground was not holy from receiving the body of a child, it surely became holy because of the father’s praise. A broken heart that yet worships God. An earthly father who worships his Heavenly Father in the midst of the deepest grief any father can know. How can the Christian develop a lifestyle of worship—a heart that is continually grateful, prayerful, and submissive to the will of God.

Be regular at appointed times of corporate worship. It has become increasingly popular in our culture for Christians to exempt themselves from corporate worship. Not only is this unbiblical (Hebrews 10:24-25), it has the same effect as pulling a log out of a fire. The personal fire for worship of God burns bright when fueled by the worship of many.

Be regular at appointed times of personal worship. It has also become widespread for Christians to plan time with God while driving, showering, exercising, and mowing the lawn. I am convinced that this practice should not be a substitute for a personal “quiet” time with God. Distractions do just that—they distract! And we must be in a still, small place on a regular basis to hear the still, small voice of God—and to offer our voice of praise to Him. Make sure you are setting aside priority time daily to be alone with God in prayer, Bible reading, and worship.

Cultivate the practice of unscheduled worship. Everyone has times during the day when discretionary minutes present themselves. Instead of turning on the television, flipping through a magazine, calling a friend, or dozing off, get in the practice of redeeming the time to focus on the Lord. Read a pocket Bible. Offer a prayer of thanks to God for your health and welfare. Praise Him for the help you know He will bring in the situation you are facing. Communing continually with God throughout the day and night is the experience of worship (Psalm 16:7; 63:6; 119:48).

Offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God. This is an exhortation in the strongest of terms from the apostle Paul (Romans 12:1). When we make the transition in our thinking from offering a sacrifice of worship to becoming a sacrifice of worship we are moving toward reclaiming the experience of worship which we have lost. Paul says that such an act of worship is only reasonable in light of what God has done for us. We go to God’s house to worship on Sunday, but we are the temple of God every day of the week. We offer our sacrifice of worship—time, talent, and treasure—but we are the sacrifice God desires most.

As you will learn, sacrifice is at the heart of worship. Living every moment in the wonder of worship will change the way you live every day. It will require alterations in your thinking, your priorities, and your approaches to every portion of your life. Some of this will be painful. You’ll be building a profile of obedience, and you’ll be clearing away impediments that block the wonderful view. In the end, you’ll count it all as loss for the perfect joy of knowing God.