

RESTORING

THE HEART OF
WORSHIP

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Forward

Worship is the most important activity that takes place in our personal walk with God and in our churches. The whole of the Bible, from the fall of man in Genesis through to the book of Revelation, is the story of God's plan of redemption for His people. Our worship and our submission to Jesus and His purposes is central to that plan.

We were not created to be pastors, evangelists or for any other church activity, though these have become necessary due to the fall of man and the outworking of God's redemption. We were created for one purpose; that we might be close to Him, walk with Him, be intimate with Him and that we would enjoy Him, and Him us. We are Jesus' bride; we are His desire and we are His children.

We will never fulfil all that God had for us without intimacy with Him. Being close to Him must be the focal point of both our personal lives and of our churches, because if He is not the centre then we have missed the point. It is too easy to become focused upon the things of God, especially those of us in lay or full time ministry, whilst losing our focus upon the true goal, Jesus Himself. Unless we learn how to walk with Him we will never see the fullness of His restoration in our lives. We can have all the teaching, all the activity, all the professionalism, and yet without Him we will only ever have empty religion.

Jesus is calling His bride to turn her heart to Him again, to meet Him and to walk with Him in everything that He has for us.

In this book, I hope to explain what worship is and how central it is in all that God does with His people from the Old to the New Testament, and how we need to apply His teaching to both our personal lives and our churches.

My passion is that we each grow closer to Him, and that our churches become places full of His glory, power and truth. If you have any questions about worship, the content of this book, or to inquire about my speaking at your church or house group, feel free to email: benjaminsealey@live.com or connect with me on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/Benjamindsealey> or alternatively contact me via my website at www.worshipacademy.com

Thank you,

Benjamin.

What is worship?

To understand worship, we must begin at the very beginning of the Bible.

When God created man He did so for one reason, because He loved man and wanted to be with him. God desires fellowship with His creation. Because there was no sin in the world and no rebellion, man walked in perfect harmony with God. Man was completely submitted to God. He had no disobedience in his heart, and as a result, both man and God walked together in perfect union.

This was how God intended it be and how it should always have been, man living in complete submission to, and living in, the fullness of God.

It was out of this place that man was seduced into rebelling against God, (see Genesis Chapter 3.) Because of man's sin, that unity between man and God was lost, and mankind was expelled from the Garden of Eden. The whole of the rest of Bible is the story of God restoring that intimacy between Himself and man. Man could no longer walk with God as he had in the Garden of Eden because of the sin that had entered his heart. This is the reason why God sent Jesus to pay the price for that rebellion, to be the sacrifice for our sin and to enable a way that we might know Him once more in the way that God intended.

It is important to understand this background to fully understand worship, because we must always understand that God's first and foremost desire is that we walk closely with Him again, in unity with Him. God loves man and desires to work both with him and through him, but in order for this to happen we must first learn to put aside our rebellious nature and submit to God.

The English word "worship" literally means worth-ship. It is ascribing worth to something. At its core, the word worship is about surrender. In England in crown courts we address the judge as "your worship." In doing so, we are acknowledging that the judge has more worth than us, and is a higher authority. In worshipping someone we are lifting them above us, and at the same time, we are surrendering to them and their authority.

So our worship to God is our active decision to put aside our own desires and motives, and instead acknowledging God's worth, His authority, His rule and His power. It is both relinquishing ourselves, and lifting Him up.

This process of surrendering, as we will see later, is the means by which we draw closer to God. In the Garden of Eden we lost our relationship with God through our rebellion. Now, through Jesus, when we actively decide to surrender ourselves and seek His worth over our own, we will draw closer to Him and regain that relationship.

Worship therefore is not actually the goal - it the process by which we achieve the goal. The goal is to encounter God and be close to Him. The process by which we achieve that goal is worship.

To worship or not to worship is always our decision. God wants us to surrender to Him out of love, not because we are forced to. There will be a time when all eyes will see Him and every knee will bow before Him, but that time is not now. Now is a time for those who would seek Him, for those who would sacrifice their lives for the sake of drawing near to Him. God is not looking for slaves who are forced to submit to Him but rather servants,

those who choose to submit.

It is important to understand that when God talks about worship He is not talking about music, (although there is a place and purpose for music,) nor is He talking about singing the latest chorus or hymn. When God talks of worship, He is talking about those who would give their all for Him in complete surrender. Paul understood this when he wrote, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God---this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1.)*

Paul realised that true worship was giving his life as a sacrifice before God, surrendering to His will alone. This is the worship that God is looking for in these times, worship that would lead people to forsake their lives for Him.

If we are to lead God's people into worship and see powerful and life changing worship in our own lives and in our churches, we must be completely clear about what it is. We must understand that we are leading the people into that place of surrender. Worship must become the centre of our lives and of our ministries and churches. God moves wherever we allow Him to, so as we go deeper in our surrendering and our dependency upon Him, He will be able to move in new and more powerful ways.

Most of what God has done in my own life has been in those times of worship and in those places of true encounter. I've experienced the Glory of God like I could not even describe. I've had healing and deliverance, all in those times when it has just been me on my own seeking Him and humbling myself before Him. God has all this for us and much more if we would only learn to bow down before Him and set our hearts on Him. He is a God of restoration, and when we learn to walk in His ways we will also walk in the reality of that restoration. The goodness of God should not merely be a theory that we talk about or understand just intellectually, but it should be evidently manifest in all areas of our lives. This is what God has for us to live in, this is the reality of abiding in His kingdom.

God is always looking for the best for us, but His best depends upon our surrender to His ways. A worshiper is someone who learns, like Paul did, to lay their lives down in order to seek His alone. The prize for the worshiper is not fame, money or power, but simply Jesus Himself.

Proskuneo

One the main Greek words for worship is "Proskuneo."

The word "Proskuneo" literally means to move towards (*pros*) and to kiss (*kuneo*.) In the West we tend to think of kissing as being a romantic gesture, but that isn't the case here. The implication is not of romance, but of surrender to authority. In medieval times, when

a man was made a lord by the king, that man would bow before the king and kiss the back of his hand in reverence and surrender. This gesture, which is a common sign of surrender throughout mankind, even in the animal kingdom, perfectly illustrates proskuneo worship.

One of my favourite biblical examples of true, proskuneo worship is from John 12: 1-8:

"Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

In this passage we have two main characters: Mary and Judas. There is some debate over who exactly Mary of Bethany was, but whoever she was, she was someone of little importance. She had no worldly stature and was a woman in a society that did not hold women in high regard. In essence, she was nothing, a woman who no one would notice or respect.

Contrast this with Judas. Judas was the most respectable of the apostles. He was in charge of the apostles' money, and it is speculated that he may have had some kind of finance background. Judas was a man to be respected.

Mary's response to being close to Jesus is that of a true worshipper. She takes everything she has, (the perfume cost around one year's wages,) and she poured it out at Jesus' feet. She took all she owned and laid it before Him, for no other reason than for Jesus' pleasure. She made herself the least, being content simply to be His presence.

Judas' reaction to Mary's outpouring was one of offence. Religion is always offended by genuine worship (see Michal despising David in 2 Samuel 6.) Judas' heart was not for Jesus, but to see his own glory. He talks about giving money to the poor not out of love for the poor, but to make himself look good. Judas used religion as a vehicle to increase his own status.

These two people reacted differently to Jesus. One poured everything she had before Jesus, and the other was concerned only with increasing his own importance and in using Jesus to make himself more impressive to man.

The Heart

There was one simple difference between Mary and Judas; it is the difference of the heart. The differences in the state of the heart of these two followers of Jesus determines how they responded to Him and how close they were to Him.

Our heart is where our desires come from. The desires of our heart is what drives us. Whatever we desire as a human is what leads us to take the actions we do. Our desires determine our decisions, the choices we make, our character and how we respond to those around us.

Before the fall of man, man's heart was in perfect unison with God, and so man walked in unity with Him. When Adam and Eve rebelled against Him though, sin entered man's heart and it no longer desired only God, but desired its own desires. Our hearts in their sinful state are about us and what we desire, they are naturally rebellious towards God.

We all desire something for ourselves, be it attention, wealth, power, security, sex, affection, possessions, relationships, stability or so on. The desires of each of us is different, and the extent to which we are driven by our hearts determines our character and behaviour. Just because we are Christians or in ministry, does not mean that our hearts are automatically correct. We can be in ministry, like Judas was, but use the name of Jesus to draw attention to ourselves or to advance our own status, to look good and to impress men or to develop our career within church organisation. This is very much something I have to battle with. My sinful state desires to draw attention to me, it craves to be the centre, rather than allowing Jesus to be the centre.

When I worship I am actively deciding to surrender. I ask Jesus to change my heart and my focus, so that only He becomes the centre. I submit myself until I become unimportant, until only His desire and will counts. I lay down my own righteousness (i.e. the fact that I think I am right,) and accept His righteousness, (the fact that He is right.) As I worship, I ask Jesus to change my heart so that it no longer desires its own, but desires only what God Himself desires. Through the process of worship, our hearts are transformed from self-focused to God focused.

We cannot change our own hearts, only Jesus can. As we choose to surrender before Him we need to ask Him to deal with our hearts. We need to seek His heart over ours. God gives us every good thing when we ask (Matthew 7:11,) and He always answers and gives to the person who desires to have their heart changed by Him.

Drawing Closer

In my own worship time, as I ask Jesus to change my heart and give me His, I begin to

see and hear him more clearly. The result of my submission to Him is that I grow closer to him, I walk in greater unity with Him, and I begin to desire what He desires. If I submitted perfectly to Him (which only the perfect person could ever do, that being Jesus Himself,) then in theory I would walk as close to Him here on Earth as Adam did in the Garden of Eden.

“Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.” (Psalm 24 3-4.)

It is only as our hearts are washed and purified by Him through the process of worship and of seeking His heart that we will draw near to Him. A pure heart is one that desires nothing for itself but only desires Him and what He wants both in us and other people.

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13.)

We must also be aware here is nothing as deceptive or corrupt as the human heart.

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9.)

Our hearts are most deceitful thing there is. As we generate a desire or point of view from our hearts it is very hard for us to see past that desire being the correct one. We all assume that we are right, otherwise we wouldn't do what we are doing. We start at the point of our righteousness and we measure other people by that point of view. If we are looking for a church we generally have a set idea of what we would like from a church, what we want the music to be like, the preaching or the people or child care, and then we find somewhere that closest matches those desires. We judge other people according to the standards and viewpoints that we hold. We do this in every area of our lives. Our unchanged hearts exist in a state of self-righteousness. We believe that we are right and that everything centres around what we think to be correct, and we judge by that standard. This sinful nature is how all our hearts are:

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...” (Isaiah 64:6)

The filthy rags referred to here in Isaiah are actually menstrual rags. That is the reality of our hearts outside of Jesus. Outside of Him we are wrong. Jesus is the way and the truth, (John 14:6.) There is no truth outside of Him and nothing is right outside of Him. He is the very definition of truth. Nothing we generate out of ourselves is correct, and we are in deception if we think it is.

A major stumbling block to both our walking in unity with Jesus and to our being used to advance His kingdom is pride. Pride is a part of our self-righteousness. Our pride likes to put us at the centre, especially as ministers, and we may try to advance ourselves by our own strength to make ourselves look good or to become the focus of attention. Jesus understood this when he noticed how the table guests in Luke 14:7 loved to take the

seats of honour. I know that that same pride is in my heart – my heart desires to be honoured, to be the centre of attention and to be praised by man. When church ministers meet together the situation is often as Jesus talked about. We like to project ourselves as the most important, and there is often a subtle (or not so subtle!) jostling for position. We do it when we meet people in person, but also in areas such as social networking. We try to project our importance and our success rather than being happy to take the lowest place.

A person concerned with being close to God will not care about impressing man and will be open and honest about their imperfect hearts. Jesus taught us that we were to take the lowest place, to become the least and the most unimportant. In making ourselves less important in the world we become of more importance in the Kingdom and can be used more by God. He will entrust us with the things of His heart rather than with the things that men are concerned with. In doing the works of Kingdom we may go unnoticed by man, but when our hearts are right our only concern will be pleasing God as opposed man. Whenever I go to a church or conference to speak, and even in my daily life, I have to spend time worshiping and asking Jesus to deal with my heart so that I don't operate in pride in the meeting. I can fall into desiring to make myself look good as much, or even more, than anybody. In trying to advance myself, I will take my eyes off the cause of the Kingdom, which is always about God first followed by love for other people. When our eyes and hearts are fixed upon that which Jesus desires, we will begin to see and hear Him more clearly and we will see the desires of God and the needs of people rather than trying to advance ourselves.

A self-centered heart tries to collect followers, as followers mean success in the flesh-driven part of the church. Again, it is our pride that drives us to seeking those followers. A minister who ministers with God's heart does not care about people following him, but about serving and loving people. A pure heart will desire what is best for other people regardless of the cost to ourselves. It may be that people do come to us to be ministered to or to be part of our church, but the God focused minister will understand that the people are not there for him, but he is there to serve the people and to protect and lead them. A minister with a pure heart will understand God's heart for his people and so will not try to use the people to build a bigger platform for himself, but will understand the responsibility they have as a minister that they lay their life down for the sheep's sake.

*“Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.”
(John 10:15.)*

It is worth noting that by the end of Jesus' ministry He had few followers left. Most of the crowds that had followed Him had not only left Him, but actively sought His execution. Anyone looking at Jesus' ministry from the outside would have considered it to be a failure. Jesus though understood that in order to see God's kingdom established He had to die. He made Himself the lowest of the low, the servant of all, simply so he could minister God's love. As a result, He is now the King above all Kings in the Kingdom of God. He who made Himself last on the earth is now the first in the Kingdom.

"So the last will be first, and the first will be last." (Matthew 20:16.)

Jesus always understood His authority and who He was, and yet whilst on this earth He decided to be the least. A heart like this does not come naturally to most people, especially not to me, which is why I must spend so much time asking God to change my heart before I can minister effectively with a pure love for God and His people and without ulterior motives.

"But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." (Hebrews 2:9.)

When we worship, we actively lay down all that we think is right about ourselves and we seek His righteousness. We have to realise the sinful nature of our hearts, and seek His heart and His desires. Unless we are a people who live our lives in a state of worship as Paul did, (see Romans 12:1,) we will walk in our own righteousness and in the desires of our own hearts, believing them to be correct. The only possible way to advance His Kingdom is if we have His heart. Without His heart, we will not see things as He does, which is the only way of seeing correctly and instead we will see things as we believe to be right. In our attempts at trying to do right, we will be deceived. In spite of our best intentions and our believing our actions to be good, if we have not sought His heart, we will not walk in unity with Him and not only will we not be advancing His kingdom, we will actively damage it.

We cannot judge right or wrong by our own hearts or perceptions. When Adam sinned, he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. His sin was to be able to discern right from wrong outside of God. There is no right outside of Jesus, there is no truth and there is nothing good outside of Him. If we do not spend our lives in a state of worship we will miss His truth. Will we only find the truth in Him.

Each of us are called into different areas of ministry, some are called to be apostles, some pastors, some prophets, some evangelists, and some teachers (Ephesians 4:11,) but there is a danger in taking on our calling but without seeking His heart. The gifts of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29,) they will not be taken away from us, but it is very easy to walk in those gifts but in our own righteousness, acting as we believe to be right. Without seeking His heart in everything, the pastors will lead the people the wrong way, the teachers will teach incorrectly, the evangelists will evangelise out of their own strength and miss what God is doing. In short, the church will not function as it should, by Him working through us, but we will walk in our own ideas of what we should be doing. Such a church will be a church of disunity and dysfunction. When we walk in our own righteousness there will be no genuine power or Kingdom authority in anything we do. This is why seeking His heart must be the centre of all that we do. When we do not seek Him, our churches will be full of us and will merely represent the flaws of man rather than the power of God. Man's way is never the right way, *"There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death."* (Proverbs 14:12.)

For God's bride, His church, to become all that it is called to be and to function as it should function, we must give ourselves over to seeking His heart and His righteousness. We cannot see His church walk in that which it is called to without worship becoming the centre. We are called to minister to the world in unity with Him through His Spirit, but without submission to His heart and purposes we will simply minister in our own flesh. At best, this is useless, but at worst can actually damage the very people we want to minister to. Ministry that is generated out of our own unchanged hearts will not be true ministry at all, but will usually lead men to us and to what we are doing and desire. Ministry that is in unity with His heart will always lead the people to Him, to his life, freedom and restoration.

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33.)

The Greatest Commandment

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:36-40.)

The pure heart that God desires for us is a heart of love. Jesus stated that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God. Similarly, the first commandment in the Old Testament is that *“You shall have no other gods before me.”* (Exodus 20:3.) We will only effectively impact the earth when we walk with hearts of real love, with hearts that love others as God loves.

We often confuse love with desire, lust, emotionalism or our desiring others. If we genuinely love someone, our only concern is the best for that person. Lust wants to take something from a person, love only wants to act for their best interests. Love has no conditions and no terms. A heart of love is willing to be last in order that the other person gets more.

A heart that loves God with all our soul and all our mind is a heart that is consumed by Him. Such a heart does not come to God just to get things from Him but to love Him for His sake. We may be misled by chasing after miracles hoping to get ours, and sometimes we can be left disappointed when what we hoped God for doesn't happen. It is absolutely true that God heals and does miracles, as I can personally testify, but we do not approach him like a genie in a bottle waiting to grant us our wishes. If my wife, when we first met, was coming after me for money or presents, children or a house or

security, we would never had entered into a relationship and she would have got none of those things. Instead, my wife and I came together out of love. As a result of our love, we have all those things such as security, protection, and children and so on, but they were never the goal of our relationship but a fruit. These things developed naturally out of our union.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23.)

When we walk in a relationship with God out of love, the fruits of restoration will naturally be produced in our lives. An apple tree cannot help but produce apples, it is a natural outworking of what it is. Similarly, a person living in a genuine relationship with God based upon love will naturally produce the fruits of the Spirit that grow out of that relationship. We do not chase the fruits, but rather we seek the union with Jesus, out of which the fruits will naturally flow. Instead of just chasing the things of God, we must begin to chase God himself. From that place everything else will be given to us, (Matthew 6:33.) If we advertise a meeting as a healing meeting, many people will come hoping to get something from God, but if we advertise a meeting simply as a time of seeking God, the reality is that it will not be so busy because many of us simply want something from God rather than wanting God Himself.

“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 4:3.)

The second greatest commandment that Jesus gave us is to “love your neighbour as yourself.” Loving people with no other agenda than for their sake is one of the hardest things to do, as again our hearts mean that we often only act for selfish reasons, even if those reasons may not be apparent on the surface. We can only know what love actually is by seeing Jesus and what he is doing. Love is an absolute based upon Jesus himself, as He is the very definition of love, (1 John 4:8.)

A heart that loves is both selfless, but also rooted in the truth and reality of Jesus. Jesus’ truth is absolute, and not subject man’s opinions about what is or isn’t good. When we learn to seek His heart, we will begin to see from His viewpoint, and we will begin to love as He loves, selflessly, but always on God’s terms, not man’s.

If we as His people were to have Jesus’ heart for both God and other people, our churches would become the most dynamic, exciting and attractive places that there are, far more so than if we try to make them attractive in by our own ways. We will begin to walk in that heart only when we begin to turn ourselves over to worship.

“He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend.” (Proverbs 22:11.)

Broken

Judas' reaction to Jesus and Mary were no different from what goes on in most of us, (including myself.) Our natural instinct is to look good before men, especially those of us "on the platform" within our churches. Indeed, that is why many of us who are musicians became musicians, to look good in front of man. Our sinful state tries to take glory for ourselves and tries to increase what we have, our importance, our sphere of influence, our ministry, and our finances. Our hearts desire both man's affirmation and his admiration. Our hearts are no better than Judas', until God deals with them. That is why being broken by God is the most wonderful gift God can give us.

Being broken is when God breaks our own desires and our own will, so that we may turn our hearts to Him. We can only worship with a heart that is seeking Him for His own sake. When we use Jesus to lead men to ourselves, as Judas did, we are not worshiping, in spite of our religious appearance, but actually leading men to us rather than Him. We need to ask God to deal with our hearts, so that our only desire, like Mary, is to be happy being the least, simply for the privilege of being close to Him. That is the pure heart that God desires in us, a heart that puts a love for God above everything else. A person whose heart has been changed to one that only desires God and what he desires is the person who will walk closely with God.

This is a part of my story of being broken. I became a Christian when I was 17, after having a genuine encounter with God, and being a good musician in a small church, I quickly became part of the worship team. I am someone who likes to do things. I am a naturally driven person, and I like to have purpose and ambition. Because this is my natural inclination, in the following weeks I quickly got involved in most things in the church, and subsequent churches I joined. I ran youth groups, music groups, outreaches, worship teams etc. in fact I did all those things that is encouraged in church. I was a "doer" I preached, I studied, I ministered. I went to all the meetings. I was busy with church, and church activity became my life.

After around 10 years of this, God spoke to me. In fact, in all my years of church activity, I had never really heard His voice. I had "feelings" that I thought were Him, but now He confronted me, via another person with these words, "*you do not know me.*" Now, here was I, someone who had given many hundreds of hours to the church, to doing what I assumed was His work, being told by God that I did not know Him. I did not believe what God was saying, and my pride struggled to accept what God was saying. How dare someone say that I did not know God? Could they not see who I was? I railed against the word of God for some days, maybe even weeks. The person who brought me the message must be wrong; the problem lies with them, not me – there must be a spiritual problem with that person. And yet even in my state of self-righteousness, and anger, I

knew it was God who sent me the message. At that point I had a choice. Either continue as I was, or repent. There was a small part of me that knew I had to repent, and accept that I had no real relationship with God, that I was caught up in the treadmill of church activity without really knowing Him. I got on my bed, and decided that I was going to seek God until I found Him.

I started confessing my sin, confessing that I had no real desire for God. I started to ask Him to change my heart, so that I would begin to desire him. As I started seeking, praying and confessing, I began to get a true taste of His glory. The more I repented and prayed, the closer I got. After about 3 hours of this the Heavens began to open, and I began to see God in His glory. The repentance became liberating, exhilarating, leading me closer to Him. He began to show me truth of my Christian life so far, that it was built entirely on my own strength, on my own righteousness, my own pride and ambition. At best, my "ministry" up to that point had been useless, at worst dangerous and damaging. I knew, sitting in His presence that this is what I really wanted, that this is what the reality of a Christian walk should be. I phoned my pastor and resigned from all church activities. The thought of leading worship again made me feel physically sick, knowing how I had been doing it without God. I resolved that I would never do anything within church again, until He commanded me otherwise. My place from then on was going to be spent like Mary of Bethany, at the feet of Jesus, enjoying Him alone.

The following weeks were an absolute joy. I spent as much time as I could just seeking God. Reading the Bible, which I had always found quite dull, suddenly came to life, every verse I read, though I had read them many times before, were full of revelation. I could not get enough of His word, or of seeking Him. I had been saved 10 years before, and had been filled with the Holy Spirit, and had the occasional encounter with God, usually when someone else prayed with me, and I was sometimes around the genuine things of God, but from the point of being saved I never really developed my own relationship with God. What I had thought of as walking with God was actually just church activity, of which I did plenty. I gave lip service to God, I said the right things, acted (outwardly,) the right way, I prayed spiritual sounding prayers, and even prophesied spiritual sounding prophecies, and yet I did not KNOW Him. I knew all about Him, yet had no actual relationship with Him. In my doing, I had missed the whole point, and the point is Him.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (Matthew 7:21-23.)

In the years since then, I have been totally transformed as a person, both physically and in terms of character. By walking in submission to Him, He has been able to work on me, changing me, teaching me, maturing me. That work is ongoing, and I am well aware how my heart needs continue to change, but I also know that I am a witness to how He transforms. The redemptive, restoring work of Jesus is a reality. Religion talks about Him,

but a genuine walk with Him sees real transformation. Religion, empty words, (even charismatic religion,) never changed anything, but the reality of Jesus does.

Repentance

Repentance is a major part of being broken. The word “repent” is a word that has been abused and misused in the church, to bring condemnation or to manipulate people. However, it is actually a very positive, liberating word. To repent means to turn away from operating incorrectly in our flesh, and to turn towards Him and His ways. It means to turn from the negative to the positive. Because of the misuse and negative connotations of the word, many churches have shied away from using it, but without true repentance and without turning away from our own ways and turning to His, we will never truly see Him or walk in His Kingdom. Repentance is key to entering into His kingdom, which is why it was Jesus’, John the Baptists’ and the apostles’ central message. I believe that the message of repentance is one of the most positive messages there is, as it moves us from the wrong direction to the right one.

“From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 4:17.)

We must repent of anything that comes between us and His will, which is so much more than the “bad things” which we know we ought not to do. We repent of everything that resists the Spirit of God, everything that we try to build ourselves, our families, our churches and our businesses, we have to give them back to Him and allow His Spirit to operate in them. We must take up the lowest place of all, the place of a servant, having no will, no desire but Jesus Himself. That is the worship that God has for our lives and our churches. That is the proskuneo worship that God desires in His church.

On the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed, Matthew 5:3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Our spirit determines our will, our desire. The poor in spirit are the broken or the humble, those who have no will apart from what Jesus desires. Jesus said that it is a blessing to be broken, because then, we will walk in the Kingdom of Heaven.

If our lives and churches are to see the true power and restoration work of Jesus, then we must begin to deal with, and ask Jesus to deal with, our hearts. It is only through our decision to worship and to surrender ourselves and seek Him that our hearts can be changed, enabling us to walk in unity with Jesus. Ministry that comes out of our own strength and ability is not ministry. It may make us look and feel good, but it is not His work, it is ours. It will lead men only to us and what we are establishing. When our churches are broken to Jesus’ will, to seeking Him and to serving Him, then we will be a people who truly walk in Kingdom authority and power. Only then will we be a people who can change our families, or towns or even nations. This is our calling, but to achieve our

calling, we must allow our hearts to be turned to Him alone. It is only through true worship that our hearts can be transformed. God wants to work through us to advance His kingdom upon the earth, and the degree to which we are truly broken and surrendered to God is the degree to which we will be successful in that calling.

Hungry for God

The things of God are not always obtained easily or without effort or cost, but they are there for those who would seek and for those who would sacrifice their lives to chase what God has for us. Those with a passion for God will abandon themselves to seeking their inheritance from God and the good things that He has for us. The inheritance that God has for us as His children are not necessarily financial wealth or worldly success, but rather they are the things of Him, His character, His teaching, His life, His joy, His peace and His heart.

The rewards of God are the reality of His Kingdom, which are not always the rewards of the flesh. When we are flesh-orientated in our outlook, we will come to God to give us more of the things of the flesh. There is, to a point, a rightness in this, God does provide physically as well as spiritually, as we are both physical and spiritual beings, but a life lived seeking God merely for things such as wealth, better jobs and an easier life will miss out on the deeper things that he wants to give for. It is fine to have things of the flesh, but we must understand that that is all that they are, they are temporary, and not the goal of the life of a Kingdom orientated person. In fact, worldly wealth, although not necessarily wrong in itself, can be a distraction and hindrance to us living in His Kingdom. This is why Jesus said:

“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19:24.)

We must also be aware that we cannot build Kingdom through our physical resources or personal resources.

I remember God once rebuking me on this subject. In order to improve the professionalism of the worship in church, I began buying a lot of equipment through which I could produce excellent sounding music to support the worship. As a musician, I, like most musicians, can get a little carried away with equipment and technology, and I look for excuses to use the latest equipment. One day, whilst testing some equipment in church before a service, God spoke to me and rebuked me. He told me that I didn't need any of the equipment, that in fact, it was a hindrance, and that all I needed was Him. I had wasted time and money pouring into something that would have impressed man, and instead that time could have been used praying and getting hold of what God had for us

as a church. As I got rid of the computers and samplers, we led worship in the church with just an acoustic guitar, and it was one of the most powerful times of collective worship we had in that place. It probably wasn't as polished or impressive sounding, but we met God in a mighty way.

All that is needed to advance the Kingdom of God is a life open to Jesus. Jesus understood this when he sent the disciples out:

*“Don't take any money with you, nor a traveler's bag, nor an extra pair of sandals...”
(Luke 10:4.)*

There is nothing wrong in taking the extra provisions in itself, but Jesus wanted them to rely upon Him alone. With physical resources, we can build our own kingdoms and ministries in Jesus' name, but it will not necessarily be Him. In my experience, God has always provided my physical needs as I have sought Him, and he has provided when He has instructed me to do something. I have never had to ask, or manipulate people. In fact, we do not even take a collection in church – those who do give do so because of their own faithfulness, desire to give, or because God has told them to. My job is not to manipulate money out of people, my job is to do the will of God, and in doing so everything else is given to provide for what He wants to do. Money does not get mentioned in church, only God does, and everything else flows from that place. If we were build something in our own strength it will take physical resources, and as churches we can become consumed by raising funds to sustain that which God is not sustaining. Quite simply, if the focus of our ministry is raising funds to sustain something, then it is not being sustained by God.

Money is the currency of the world, and we do need it to pay for the things of the world, which are necessary, and indeed God will use people to help to provide those needs. However, Kingdom is gained not through paying the world's currency of money, but by paying the currency of the Kingdom, which is lives broken and given over to Him. That is the cost that we are required to pay for the reward of Him. True ministry does not require fancy resources, but an empty vessel that will pour out what Jesus has for the people.

God has purposely designed it so that we seek Him for what He has. He wants us to choose to be reliant upon Him rather than ourselves, and our inheritance for living a life that seeks Him is simply that we would truly know Him and walk in Him.

Jacob is an example of such a man who was hungry for what God had for him. When we read about Jacob from chapter 27 of Genesis, we read of a man who cheated and tricked his way to get his inheritance. This may seem wrong to us as Christians, but Jacob's desire for God was more important than anything else. Jacob's brother, Esau, was Isaac's favourite, and was due to inherit that which Isaac had, but he gave away his inheritance for a bowl of stew (see Genesis 25:34.) Out of these two brothers, we would probably see Esau as the more righteous one. Jacob was a cheat, even his own father did not like him, whereas Esau was honest and worked hard, and his father loved him.

Between Jacob and Esau, God chose Jacob to establish His people. Most of the church would choose Esau, the hard working provider, but God valued a passion for Him more highly than anything that man may value.

“I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” (Malachi 1:2-3.)

God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, and established His people through Jacob’s line. Esau was a man of the flesh, signified by his love of hunting, who gave away his blessing just for a meal, for something that satisfies the flesh. Jacob did not care for the flesh, but for the things of God. Jacob even wrestled with God himself, (Genesis 32:22-28,) hungry for that which God might give Him.

God looks upon our desire for Him above all everything else. Man looks to outwards appearances, to how respectable we are, but God look at our hearts. He looks at our desire for Him.

Picking up our cross

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24.)

Jesus taught so many basic truths about what is to know and follow Him, truths that we as His people need to return to again and again. Man’s heart being what it is tries to twist the things of God to make it all about us. Somehow, we have ended up making our walk with God being all about our being catered to, our being kept happy, and about getting what we want on our terms. This is a distortion of the whole message of Jesus and of Christianity. When we make our churches all about man’s will and desires, we lose the absolute basics about what it is to be a Christian. In turn our churches become places with no power or life because we are focused upon man rather than God.

There are a few accounts in the Bible of people asking to follow Jesus, and He gave each of them a condition to following Him. To one man, Jesus challenged him to leave all his wealth in order to follow Him (Luke 18:22.) To another, Jesus told him to leave burying his father (Luke 9:60,) and to another to not even say goodbye to his family (Luke 9:62.) To the following crowds, Jesus said this:

“Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—

yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:25-27.)

Jesus made it clear that if we are to follow Him, then we follow Him on His terms. We cannot expect Him to get involved in what we are doing on our terms. This is a distortion of what it is to be a true follower of Christ. When Jesus told us to pick up our cross and follow Him, it means simply that we are to sacrifice ourselves. We must lay down our own lives and give ourselves over to doing things His way, as opposed to trying to get Jesus involved on what we are doing on His behalf.

Real worship is an understanding of this truth, that we are the tail not the head, the followers not the leader, the least, not the highest. The apostle Paul walked in this revelation, and as a result, God was able to use him to build His church more than anybody else in history. That is the power of a broken life, one dedicated to seeking and following Him.

Because we in the church understand the power of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, that He took our sins and paid the price and that our salvation does not come from works, we have sometimes misunderstood that to mean that there is no cost to following Jesus. It is absolutely true that He paid once and for all for our sins, and that we cannot earn salvation through our works or effort. Salvation is there for anybody who calls on His name (Romans 10:13,) but to truly be his disciple or His follower carries a cost. The cost is our lives. Everything that we desire in our hearts has to be sacrificed up to Him in order that we may begin to desire what He desires. In Luke 14, Jesus urges his followers to count the cost of following him, because to be close to Him and to learn from and to be used by Him requires us leaving behind everything that our own heart's desire.

In John 6, Jesus feeds the five thousand. It was at this point that Jesus had his greatest following. People love to receive, especially for free. After seeing His miracles, they even try to make Him king (John 6:15.) Then Jesus changed the emphasis of His teaching. He taught how He, Jesus, is the bread of life and how everything is held in Him, and how He was sent not to do man's will but the will of the father. When the people heard this, they begin to grumble and they ceased to follow Him (John 6:66.)

People are happy to follow someone who gives them things, such as food or healing, and indeed Jesus does do this. To give something away to people that they want, or to promise them something that they want is the easiest way to get a following. It is this giving away part of Jesus that we like to sell in church, because it does attract followers the same now as it did then. We can make ourselves a “success” in ministry if only we give the people what they want on their terms.

Jesus' message is not about physical bread, but spiritual bread, not just physical life, but the life in Him. It was this change of preaching from the physical to the spiritual that meant many turned away, because the people were only after the physical. They were not interested in the bread of life, but in their own stomachs. They did not want Him, but what he could give them. The hearts of His followers were exposed when He began preaching that He Himself was the real bread.

The 12 disciples however did not leave Jesus. They knew that Jesus held the words of life, that He was life (John 6:67.) They had left everything to follow Him, not to get from him, but to be with Him for who He is. When the disciples were called by Jesus they abandoned their lives and businesses just to follow Him.

Sacrifice is not an optional extra to our following Jesus, it is the core of His message, both His sacrifice for us, and our sacrifice in order to know and follow Him.

The great commission was given to His people by Jesus:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28: 19-20.)

The commission is not simply to make converts, but rather it is to make *disciples*. A disciple is someone who does pick up their cross to follow Jesus. When we understand the power of what Jesus was saying when He told us to pick up our cross, we will begin to understand the calling that it is upon our lives and our churches, to make disciples and to see people become true followers of Him. Church does not exist simply to see people change one set of beliefs for another, as right as that set of beliefs may be, it exists to raise followers of Jesus. If we are to become true followers, then we must also become seekers both in our personal lives and in our churches.

Ascending the Hill of the Lord

“Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” (Isaiah 2:3.)

The symbolism of mountains is used many times in the Bible to represent our meeting with God, such as when Moses met God on Mount Sinai or when Solomon built the Temple on Mount Moriah. Like everything in the Bible, there is a depth of meaning and understanding to be gained by God's use of mountains.

Mountains are absolutely unshakable. They are the most solid, immovable object in the

world. In this verse from Isaiah we are told that it is our responsibility to ascend the mountain to meet God. A mountain will never bow down to us. It will never compromise or move to our will. Jesus has the same character as a mountain, hence him being called the "rock." (Matthew 16:18, 2 Sam 22:3,) Understanding this immovable, solid character of God is vital to understanding who He is, and our relationship with Him.

God instructs His people to travel up the mountain that we may meet Him. Note that the emphasis is on us to travel up to Him. We live in a very "us" focused society. We are used to things being done for us on our terms. Even our churches often compromise to make God more acceptable to us and to what we think is right. When planning the worship or church programme we often concern ourselves with what man will find acceptable rather than what God finds acceptable. However, God is a rock, there is no compromise in Him, no submission to what we think is right. The emphasis is put on our responsibility to travel to Him, not the other way round. If we are to really meet with Him we must do it on His terms, not on ours.

Understanding God as a rock changes our way of thinking. It changes it from thinking that God follows us around getting involved in what we are doing, to one of us having to turn to God's will, submitting to it to do things on His terms and His way. It is us who have to travel to Him, His way, not ours.

He wants us to travel to Him so He can teach us His ways, that we might follow Him, walk with Him and understand Him. The whole point of everything that has happened in creation in history and the Bible can be summed up like this: God wants us to be close to Him, to walk with Him and to know Him personally. This is why he tells us to travel to Him, so that we might KNOW him. Knowing about God is not enough. We can study all the books about God, hear all the sermons, know the Bible intimately, and yet that is not a substitute for our own relationship and walk with Him. Hearing what others have learned from God is not enough. As useful and desirable as it is to study and have head knowledge, it never replaces relationship. We need to know Him for ourselves. He wants to teach us His ways himself. We are not to live off somebody else's revelation of Jesus, we must have our own.

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26.)

Although God says He wants to teach us His ways himself, teachers are still important. In fact, Paul mentions them as part of the Five-fold ministry in Ephesians 4:11. However, we must understand what a teacher should be. A true teacher should not simply pass on their knowledge to us. It may be revelation in the teacher, but passed onto the student, it will just be cold theology. True teaching must always point the student up to the mountain for themselves. It points the way, or enables the student to get closer to God, so that the student in turn can go even further than the teacher. Any teaching that is just a formula for "how to do" or that leads the learner to be dependent upon the teacher or upon method or indeed any strength other than Jesus himself is a perversion of what teaching should

be. More than just giving information, a good teacher also discipled a student to see them develop as a person that they may become that whole person, not a just someone with head knowledge.

True teachers lead to Jesus; they do not try to replace Jesus. There have been many powerful moves of God in His church over the years. They all started with one or a handful of people who gave themselves over to seeking God and His will. The relationship these people had with God led to mighty revivals, such as the Welsh revival of 1904. However, revivals always peter out eventually, and that happens when man looks to the methods that these pioneers used, as opposed to seeking God in the way that they did. As soon as man tries to establish a pattern or method at the expense of seeking God, Jesus is not able to move in the same way that He is when He has a person dedicated to His purposes alone and to seeking His ways.

Even the Bible itself is not a means to an end. Our goal is not just to have knowledge of the Bible and what God says in it, but to understand that the Bible leads to Jesus Himself. The Bible, as vital and true as it is, is not our relationship with God, rather it leads the way to a relationship with God. As the old adage says, we seek the God of the Bible, not the Bible of the God. God wants us to be close to Him, not to a book or to learning, as useful and as right as that can be. Learning is a good thing, but it is not to take the place of our own personal walk with Jesus. Our studying and understanding should point the way to that relationship, never replace it. A true teacher will always help point the way to God, not to themselves or their understanding or even to the methods that God has given them. We in turn can never understand Jesus by just listening to sermons or teachers.

We must learn to travel up the mountain for ourselves. We can sometimes be too reliant upon others, such as a minister or pastor to go to God for us and tell us what God is saying. We do this because it takes responsibility off ourselves and puts it onto someone else. There is still a part of us that desires a priest, someone who will go to God on our behalf, because that requires no effort or responsibility from us. However, a good pastor will not simply do everything for us, but their teaching will lead us to God instead of replacing Him.

"Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god." (Psalm 24:3.)

David explains how we travel up the mountain in Psalm 24. He says that travel up the mountain, there are four criteria: Clean hands, a pure heart, not trusting idols and not swearing by a false god.

The cleanliness of our hands in the Bible represents the guilt of our sins or how much blood is on our hands. The first premise to being close to God is accepting our own sin - i.e. everything that we do outside of God, and accept Jesus' forgiveness. It is also about our current situation with God. There is no condemnation for our sins, but that doesn't mean that we act however we want. With freedom comes responsibility. We have the

freedom to sin, but also have understand the responsibility of how it affects our walk with God and our intimacy with Him. The more we walk in His holiness (as opposed to our own self-righteousness,) the closer we walk with Him.

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jer 29:13.)

It says in Jeremiah that we will find Him when we seek Him with *all* of our hearts. Not just some of our heart, and definitely not when we are seeking the things of Him at the expense of seeking Him. Our hearts are key in knowing Jesus as opposed to knowing about Him. When we desire Him, we will get Him.

Trusting in Idols and swearing by false gods are tied in with having a pure heart. An idol is anything that we trust in rather than God. Anything that comes between our love and trust of Him is an idol. Idols are often made by the hands of man, and are different from person to person, but we all have them. Our trust needs to be in Him alone.

Swearing by false gods is similar. Swearing by it means putting our promises or faith in something that is not Him but that sets itself up to be important to replace the role of Jesus in our lives. Again, these false gods differ according to our own weaknesses. Put simply, it is trusting in anything that believes itself to be above the power of Jesus.

To draw nearer to Him, the emphasis is put on us to surrender our desires, our lives, our ambitions, everything, and to simply desire one thing - Him. This is not the same as seeking the things of Him. We do not seek God's hand, i.e. what He can do, but we seek His face, who is, His character, His being. The act of doing these things are actually true worship.

The further we travel up His mountain through that journey of sacrifice and surrender, the clearer we will hear Him and see the truth around us. Places of military authority such as a castle or army base are always built on the highest point, because from that point you have the clearest view of your surroundings and situation. The further you are up Jesus' mountain, the clearer we can discern what is true and what is false. From outside of His presence we cannot tell what is or isn't Him. We can try to discern in the flesh, but that does not lead to truth, only to deception and division. The closer we are to Him, the more we will know when someone is speaking from Him or from their own flesh or understanding, as opposed to God's. He is the only truth, and we only know that truth through intimacy with Him. The higher up the mountain we are, the more Kingdom authority we walk in.

The responsibility is upon us to become seekers of Him. It is no coincidence that God told Solomon to build the temple on top of a mountain. He wanted His people to travel to Him, to sacrifice themselves to meet Him on His terms.

If My People

In the Old Testament, God illustrates His character through His relationship with His people the Israelites. There are times when they walked in faithfulness to God and His commands, and these times resulted in success and blessings. There are other times when they rebelled against God. They complained about Him, walked away from Him, built their own idols, and forgot about Him.

The Israelite's tendency to walk in their own ways, despite all that God did with them, is the same inclination that we have today. Their hearts then were the same as ours. Having experienced many different cultures around the world, one thing I have learned is that the natural state of man's heart is the same no matter what the culture or background.

Because man's heart naturally seeks its own, God taught His people first through the tabernacles of Moses and David, (which we will look at later,) and then later through the Temple, that He was to be the centre of their nation. His Presence was established amongst them, and the Israelites were instructed to continually return to Him in worship and sacrifice that they would not wander off in their own ways but remain loyal to His ways. His people were called to keep themselves separate and Holy to Him wherever they were, whether they were wandering the wilderness or established in great cities. His Presence, and the requirement of obedience by the Children of Israel, was placed at the centre of all that they did.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9.)

The people of God are called to be that holy nation. The word “church” comes from the Greek word “Ekklesia.” This word literally means to be “called out.” Our calling is to be separate from the land that we live in. We are called to live in the world, but not to operate as the world does. We are called to holiness, meaning to be set apart and distinct.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world...” (Romans 12:2)

The world has its own way of operation. It works by power, manipulation, self-seeking, self-promotion, money, alliances and covenants. In short, it operates in the flesh. The world always seeks its own, and seeks to achieve its own through fleshly means through whatever method it can employ. It tries to advance itself, to get what it can, to get what it desires and to seek its own fulfilment and its own happiness. The world acts according to what it perceives will be best for it, a vision that is skewed without looking at God.

That is fine for the world. The world will act as the world acts, but that is not our calling. Our calling is to be a people not who work through the flesh, but through the Spirit. John the Baptist, Jesus and later the apostles all carried the same message, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* This message was to His people, telling them to no longer

act as the world acts, because the Kingdom of God is here. Because Jesus has paid the price for our sins we have full access to the Father and all that is His. We do not need to carry on as the world does, we do not need to build as they do. A person of God does not try to advance their cause, even their Christian cause, through fleshly means but rather operates in Jesus through the Spirit. A person of God operates direct through Jesus, not through their own ability. They take the lowest place, knowing that if Jesus wants to promote them, He can. They take the place of the servant and of the lowly. When our hearts have been transformed, we will no longer desire what the world desires, and so we will not act like it does. Above all, as children of God we are called to keep our hearts pure, that they desire nothing but what God desires, not caring about the world and what it desires but only looking to Jesus and His heart.

The Temple

God understands our hearts soon become corrupted or tempted by the things of this world leading us to act like the world, which is why He established His Temple in the centre of His nation as a place where the Israelites could worship Him and turn their hearts to Him. The temple was established as a place of worship, where the Israelites could turn themselves back to God.

When Solomon dedicated the first Temple, God appeared to him and gave him this message:

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14.)

The Temple of God was given to the Israelites for four functions: for the people to humble themselves, to pray, to seek His face and to turn from their wicked ways.

The first word of this verse is *“if.”* The promises of God are conditional. When we do our part, God promises to do His. If we are not prepared to do what God says, then He will not do His. God tells us the condition upon which He will heal our land, and it is dependent upon our submission to Him. It is not dependent upon if we can establish a dynamic ministry or preach well, or reach more followers with our social network, but only *if* we will humble ourselves, pray, seek His face and repent. God always requires our obedience before He moves.

The calling is upon God’s people who are called by His name, i.e. the *ekklesia*, the church, to humble ourselves. This was the function of the Temple; that we would lay ourselves down, or in other words, worship Him. When we lay ourselves down, we rely not upon ourselves but upon Him, we turn ourselves to His ways.

Prayer is the ultimate expression of humility. When we turn to prayer, we are humbling ourselves and acknowledging our reliance upon Jesus. Prayer is about relying on the Spirit over our own flesh, and when we pray, we are surrendering our flesh, laying it down, and instead turning to Him. Prayer is the manifestation of our reliance upon God alone. A person who turns to prayer, rather than reacts in the flesh out of their own righteousness, is one who abides in Jesus.

In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches us how to pray:

"This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

There is such a strong correlation between prayer and worship, and it is sometimes hard to distinguish where one begins and the other ends. The Greek word for prayer is *proseuchomai*, which is very similar to the word *proskuneo* for worship. *Proseuchomai* means to turn our desires to God. It is the reliance upon Him for everything. The Lord's Prayer begins with: "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...*" These words are worship in action. They are focusing on Jesus, acknowledging His authority, seeking His Kingdom and setting our hearts in line with Him so that we desire His Kingdom, not ours. From that place of seeking His will, any need we have we look to Him for. True prayer is all about reliance upon Him.

We also forgive others as we pray, which is again a part of our acceptance that we have no righteousness of our own and that we are as guilty as anyone else. We forgive, because we know that our hearts are just as bad, and He has forgiven us. We do not forgive from a place of self-righteousness, by assuming that we are in the right but we will forgive anyway, rather we forgive out of accepting that we have no more righteousness than anyone else and that we need Jesus' forgiveness as much as anyone. Forgiveness from a place of self-righteousness is simply a manifestation of pride. Real forgiveness will flow from humility. As we forgive others from that place of humility, so we can be forgiven.

We may also fast alongside our praying. Fasting, like prayer, is another expression of humility and reliance upon Him. Fasting is representative of our surrendering our own bodies and our flesh, and looking just to His Spirit. The power of fasting is often overlooked in our western society.

Jesus said "*My house will be called a house of prayer ...*" (Matthew 21:13.) That is how His house was called to be when He established the Temple, and it is what it is called to be now. Our own lives and our churches should be a place of seeking Him and reliance upon Him, a place not of man's works, but of God's.

Interlinked with prayer and worship, we are called to "seek His face." Note it is His face we are called to seek. Seeking His face means to seek His character, to seek His personality, or in other words, to know Him. I know my wife's face. I can discern what she

is thinking at any one point in time, because I know her. If she is unhappy, it is impossible for her to hide it, because of our relationship. She may be able to fool other people, but not me. We are told to seek Jesus' face in the same way. When we walk in intimacy with Him, we begin to get in tune with His heart. We begin to see things how He sees them, to love what He loves and to hate what He hates. This level of intimacy cannot be taught, but can only be gained through spending time seeking Him and His thoughts. It is about knowing Him, rather than just knowing about Him. We are called not just to seek His hand (meaning His works,) but His character and His heart too.

The Levites

All religious activity in the Old Testament had one purpose, to lead people to God. The role of leading the people there was so important that it was not given to just anyone. God could only trust one of the tribes of Israel with this task, the Levites. The Levites were a people set aside from amongst God's people with the job of ministering to Him and leading the Israelites into God's presence. They were chosen for this the priestly role because their hearts were different than the other tribes.

In Exodus 32, after the Israelites had been set free from slavery in Egypt, Moses went up to Mount Sinai where he received the 10 commandments. With the Israelites left without their leader and shepherd they soon began to forget all that God had done for them. In their impatience, ill-discipline and rebellion, they began to take matters into their own hands.

"When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, 'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.' So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry."(Exodus 32:1-10.)

It is amazing how quickly the people forget how God had redeemed them. Rather than having the patience to wait upon God and on what he was doing with them, it was far easier to create their own god out of their own resources. Moses was only gone 40 days,

and yet without their shepherd the character and hearts of the people were exposed, and they soon gave up on waiting on God and built their own religion.

The heart of a servant is a faithful one. A servant does not move unless asked, they wait for the command of their master. The Israelites at this point did not have a servant's heart. They were happy to get the good things from God, the freedom, the miracles, the provision, and yet when faithfulness was required they were not found waiting but doing their own works just like the foolish virgins in Matthew 25.

It is interesting that with their wealth they choose to build a god. They wanted religion, yet they wanted it to be on their terms and built by their own strength. They molded God into the image that they thought he should be, the image that they found acceptable. They wanted God on demand rather than humbling themselves, seeking Him and being faithful. It is so much easier to create out of our own ability or resources rather than to be faithful and wait.

Jesus' inheritance is often called "the bride," in the Bible. (Rev 19:7, Rev 21:2, John 3:29, etc...)

"For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." (2 Cor 11:2.)

A bride is faithful. A bride is a virgin. She offers herself to no man, rather she keeps herself pure for her husband. That is what His church is called to be, a pure, unblemished bride who has eyes for her husband alone and remains faithful only to Him. The Israelites here, like us so often, were not prepared to wait for their husband. Rather than keep themselves pure, they became unfaithful, because in spite of everything He had done for them, they ultimately wanted their own satisfaction. They had not the patience, the character nor the desire to wait upon God for what He was doing. It was far easier to "sleep around" and to get their wants satisfied elsewhere.

When Moses came down from the mountain, his anger burned against them. He realised that the Israelites, God's chosen and holy ones, had become a laughing stock to their enemies (vs 25.) This is how it is when we create religion out of our own hands because of our unfaithfulness. Our enemy's do not respect those called to be a holy nation who have turned against faithfulness to the true God, and instead worship gods of their own making which hold no power.

The enemy recognises when we follow the real God and walk in His authority and when we have just empty religion. Empty religion is mocked by the world. The world sees it for what it is, powerless. When our churches create powerless works out of our own hands, the world recognises it more than we do. What we build may look to all intents and purposes to be something of God, but it will carry no real authority. It is for this reason the Israelites were laughed at by their enemies, and it is the same reason the church today carries so little respect in our society. *"As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."* (Romans 2:24.) We are God's representatives. The world

knows Him through His people. When His people operate in the same way that the world operates but at the same time uses Jesus' name, we dishonour Him and bring mockery to His name.

“So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, *“Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him,*” (Exodus 32:26.)

When Moses saw what had gone on in his absence, he declared, *“Who is on the side of the Lord?”* It was a question for God's people, for His church - who is on God's side? God was not asking the world who wanted to follow Him but His church, his chosen people. Out of all those called by His name, who was willing to lay down their own agenda and seek His? Who was willing to humble themselves, lay down their lives of follow Him?

When this challenge went out, only one of the twelve tribes of Israel stepped forward, the Levites. The Levites demonstrated that out of all God's people they were the ones willing to follow God.

Jesus carried the same message. We have seen how many people declared that they wanted to follow Jesus, and He would challenge each of them to take up their cross and to leave their family or to leave their wealth. To truly follow Jesus, we must lay ourselves down, we have to give up what we think is right and seek what He is doing. This the heart that the Levites had. This is the heart of a worshiper. It was because of their heart that the Levites were entrusted with taking the people into His presence. Aaron and his line were called into the priesthood, (Aaron was a Levite,) and those Levites who were not priests were given other forms of service before God. (See numbers 3:12-13, Deuteronomy 10:8 and Numbers 8:19.)

Then Moses said, *“You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”* (Exodus 32:29.)

The Levites were set aside for God's purposes. They did not inherit land like the rest of the Israelites - God himself was to be their inheritance. They were not to be concerned with the cares of this world, but with the things of God.

The Levites are a biblical example to those called to minister before God today. When He appointed the Levites, God did not look for those with the most musical talent or for the best public speakers. Nor did He look for the most charismatic or even for the most educated tribe. He called the tribe whose hearts desired Him. That is the only qualification God looks for in His people. There is a famous saying that states that God does not call the qualified, he qualifies the called. When God has a person whose heart is after Him, He can train, refine and disciple them to mold them into the person they need to be to fulfill their calling. That all takes time, as God matures us and shapes our character. A heart that desires Him is willing to be changed and refined His way, and so will be brought to true maturity.

David

David was such a man. When God was looking to raise up a king for His nation, He found David. David was the youngest of eight brothers, the least important one. He was a shepherd, a person who spent his life doing a relatively lowly job. His brother was more physically impressive than him and would have made an ideal choice of king if left to the desires of the people or Samuel, but God rejected David's brother Eliab.

“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

There were many more qualified people than David to run a nation, and in fact, David was probably the least likely of all the people to be chosen. However, God saw David's heart, not his strength, intellect or charisma. God knew that in David, he had a man who would seek His own heart.

“After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’ (Acts 13:22.)

That is still the only qualification to being a servant of God and of serving in His house and leading men into His presence. A person whose heart desires God can be trained, refined, disciplined and matured. A person whose heart seeks God will be willing to go through being disciplined. They will be humble enough to accept correction, or even endure hardship just for the prize of knowing Him.

David was by no means a perfect man. He had an adulterous affair and effectively murdered someone to satisfy his own fleshly desire. However, what made him different was that despite the times he gave into the flesh or made mistakes, he returned to God with humility and genuine repentance. He messed up, but always came back to putting God first, because His heart was a heart that was after God's heart.

Those who God calls are rarely perfect. Most of the people in the Bible have flawed characters like Jacob who we have already looked at, and many of our Biblical examples are murderers, liars or thieves when God calls them. What makes them different though, is that they had hearts that were willing to lose everything just to be obedient to God and to follow Him. Many people have callings on their lives but only a few are willing to do things God's way to the point where they fulfil those callings. The way of the flesh puffs us up. It makes us important and leads us to creating with our own resources, to make ourselves into a success. The way of the Spirit is a way of sacrifice and surrender in order to follow Him. His way is a way that changes our character that we would be able to walk in what God has for us. This is the heart God looks for.

For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:14.)

We sometimes judge people too quickly on the things of the flesh that impress us, be that worldly qualifications, charisma, skills or so on. These things are obviously not wrong in themselves and are even desirable, but they are not the qualification that God looks for in His house. When we fill our leadership positions simply with those with fleshly qualities, our churches will be dominated by those characteristics. His House is a house of seeking, prayer, repentance and humility. If our churches are led by people who have hearts like David who desired God's heart, then our meetings will become places that are given over to chasing God's heart.

The Kingdom of God belongs to the poor of spirit, to the pure hearted, to those who make peace, to the meek, to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, to the merciful and to those who are persecuted for the sake of His righteousness.

“But God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong.” (1 Corinthians 27.)

True spiritual fathers are essential in this time. If we fill our churches with those whose hearts are not after God but are qualified in a worldly sense, then those whose hearts do desire God, but are perhaps unskilled, unrefined, or their characters do not fit, will remain un-nurtured. We need spiritual fathers who will stand with those whose hearts are right, but are maybe immature or untrained, to see them become the person they are called to be. We need both fathers and true children, those who are willing to be changed and disciplined, not because they desire professional ministry, but because they desire God.

I have been so caught up in church activity, or “ministry,” as I believed it was, that everything became about the activity rather than leading people directly to God. This is because as I moved through church my heart was not correct. I recognise this now, but did not realise it at the time. In turn, what I produced was not people after God's heart, but more church activity. Nobody ever got changed in themselves, it was merely ministry for the sake of ministry, (although it was not really ministry at all.) A true shepherd leads the people to The Shepherd, to Jesus himself, just like the Levites did. This should be the focus of all our churches and households, to seek Him, to humble ourselves, to pray and to repent. Only hearts that desire God desire these activities. It is too easy to establish our own works out of our own resources like most of Israel did. The true ministers, like the Levites are the ones who lay themselves aside that they may be on the side of the Lord.

Entering God's presence - The Tabernacle of Moses

God's setting free of the Israelites is symbolic of His setting us free from slavery. One of

the first things God does with the Israelites after setting them free, is reveal His desire for His people to be close to Him.

In Exodus 25:22, God instructs the Israelites to construct a tabernacle where *“I will meet with you.”* The word “Tabernacle” comes from the Hebrew word, *“mishkan,”* meaning “place of dwelling” or the resting place for the presence of God. The tabernacle was a tent, in the centre of which was housed the very presence of God. It was a place established specifically so that His people could draw near to Him.

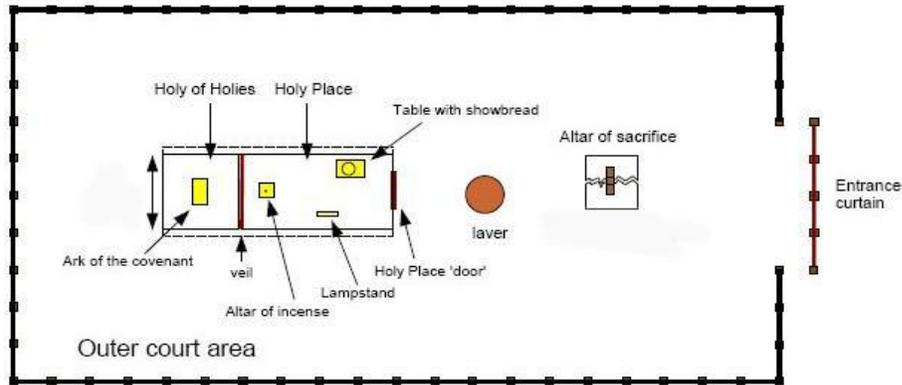
“Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered Ark of the Covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now. When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings external regulations applying until the time of the new order.” (Hebrews 9: 1-11.)

Verses 8 – 9 tells us that the Tabernacle was a symbol, or representation of how to enter into the Holiest of Holies. It was built to show us today how to enter the presence of God. God had to show His people that you cannot enter into the presence of the Holy one any way we want to, we have to enter on His terms as He demands.

The way in which God taught the Israelites to enter His presence is a through a journey of sacrifice. In the Old Testament, God taught a system of ceremonial sacrifice that led to His presence which has been fulfilled by Jesus becoming our sacrifice. Although Jesus has become our literal sacrifice paying the price for our sins, it does not mean that we do not sacrifice at all. To follow Jesus still requires a sacrifice, not a physical one, but a sacrifice of our lives, our desire, our hearts and our will. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” Luke 9:23.* To be close to Him, we must deny ourselves. The journey into God's presence is still a journey of sacrifice, but not a dead religious sacrifice, but the sacrifice of a surrendered life.

“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Psalm 51 16-1

The Tabernacle of Moses



The above diagram shows the layout of the Tabernacle of Moses.

There are 3 areas of the tabernacle, the Outer Court Area, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The Israelites entered into the tabernacle from the east. God gave them a system to enter into the Holy of Holies (where only the high priest could go.)

Into His Court – Praise vs. Worship

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.” (Psalm 100:4.)

As the Israelites entered His courts, they were instructed to do so with praise. Is praise the same thing as worship? No. We have seen how the Greek word for worship is *proskunueo*, (the Hebrew equivalent is *shachah*,) which we have seen means to submit to God, to bow down or to surrender. Yet God is giving a specific command to enter with *praise*, as opposed to worship.

So, what is praise? There are many different words for praise in the Bible, but most have a similar meaning. In this verse, the words being used here are *towadah* and *tehillah*.

The word *towdah* means to give thanks. It is thanking God for what he has done and for what He will do. The power of praise is a powerful thing. It is the proclamation of what God has done and of what He has achieved. It is agreement with the truth. Today, we

can thank God for all Jesus has done for us. When we are oppressed or discouraged, we speak out the truth of what God has done. If we are ill, we proclaim His healing.

In Ephesians 6, Paul talks about the word of God being our sword. This is a practical application of what Paul said. As we proclaim God's truth – as opposed to what we may feel or see in the physical, strongholds shake and chains are broken. This is how God told the Israelites to enter in, with the attitude of truth and thanksgiving.

Tehillah means to sing, to laud. Again it is a proclaiming word. All the words for praise are noisy, boastful, and celebratory. They are based on truth. True praise is spiritual warfare. A church that knows who it is and does not look to itself and its own problems, is a mighty army. When Jehoshaphat went into battle in 2 Chronicles 20, he understood this truth. He sent the musicians first with towdah, thanksgiving praise, which led them to victory.

So our first step in entering the presence of God is thanksgiving and praise – proclaiming the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done. Praise and worship are separate, but both important. The goal is entering His presence. The first part of that journey is praise. Some of the Hebrew words for praise are physical, they involve raising hands or creating loud noise. Praise is acting on truth however we feel, it is surrendering our body to what He says, not to how what we want. As we obey God by praising, we are submitting our body to Him. As we use our body to proclaim truth, it submits to what God says over whatever we may feel.

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.” (Hebrews 13:15.)

Worship and worship leading is a journey, a journey into the Presence of God. If we are leading worship, we have to keep this in mind. True praise is a powerful thing, but it is only the beginning of our journey. A lot of churches love to praise, which is great, but we must remember to keep moving forward if we are to enter into a deeper place with God. Praise only gets us past His gates. As the Levites led the people into the very presence of God, we must also learn to do the same

Going deeper

Praise was our first sacrifice, if we are to go deeper, we must continue to sacrifice ourselves.

The first item the Israelites encountered on their journey through the tabernacle was the altar of sacrifice. The Israelites had to bring an unblemished animal to the priest for sacrifice on behalf of the sin of the person. God was showing the people how sin needs to be paid for in blood. Today as we worship, our next step to drawing closer to God is acknowledging and confessing our sin before God, and accepting the blood of Jesus as the price for our sin. This is why one of Jesus' many titles is a lamb. He is our sacrifice.

Next was the laver, or wash basin, which was a bronze bowl of water. This is where the priests washed their hands and feet, before drawing closer to God in the Holy place. Again, the washing is symbolic of Jesus washing away our sins.

We started entering God's presence by praise – acknowledging the truth of Jesus, and proclaiming it. We draw into the Holy Place by repentance, acknowledging our weaknesses and accepting Jesus' sacrifice for our sins.

The priests could then enter the Holy Place. The first item in the Holy place was the lamp stand or menorah. A menorah has 7 candles, a central candle with 6 smaller candles by its' side. The priests were instructed to never let the candles go out. A menorah is another prophetic of the characteristics of Jesus. Jesus is the light of the world, (John 8:12, John 12:46,) and we too are to represent that light, (Mathew 5:14.) Light represents truth, and we are called to worship God is Spirit and truth, (John 4:20-24.) The truth of Jesus is an important part of worship.

There was also a table of bread in the Holy Place, where fresh bread was placed. The bread signifies the human will. To make bread, the wheat is ground into flour, as our will must be. Next, it is put through fire, as our wills must be tested and purified by fire. Our will must be submitted to God. This is the process of being broken, as I have discussed previously.

Lastly, in the Holy Place was an altar of incense, where the priests burned incense. Incense is symbolic of prayer from the saints, rising up to God (see Psalm 141:2, Revelations 8 3-4.) Prayer and worship are closely related, and as the prayers of God's children go up to God, it is like incense filling God's nostrils. True prayer comes out of worship, it is our being broken before God, and as we are broken and weak in ourselves we then must rely on God to move. You cannot have true prayer without worship or without surrender. The prayer that moves God is prayer that comes out of that place of brokenness. When Jesus taught us to pray (Matthew 6:13-19) it starts off with surrendering before God, focusing our hearts and our minds upon Jesus, and acknowledging His lordship, all of which is simply worship, before then petitioning God for our needs out of that place of brokenness and surrender. God calls His house a "house of prayer for all nations," (Isaiah 56:3) This is how HE sees His house, a place where, out of our brokenness, our prayers continually go up before God. There are ministries around the globe where there is continual prayer, continual incense into God's presence. This is what God has ordained His house to be.

Therefore truth, brokenness and prayer led the priest into the Presence of God, into the Most Holy Place. The most Holy Place or Holy of Holies literally housed the presence of God in the Ark of the Covenant. A veil, or curtain separated the Most Holy Place. God kept His presence separate, and only the high priest could enter this place and survive.

"But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance." (Hebrews 9:7)

The Presence of God was closed to man. When Jesus died, this veil of separation was torn in two (Matthew 27:51.) Jesus' blood sacrifice meant that the price of our sinfulness had been paid in full. We are now free to enter into the Most Holy Place, through Jesus our High Priest. Through this process of brokenness and surrender we can end up in the very throne room of God. Too many of us choose to live our lives on the outskirts of God's presence, never entering into His fullness. But a true worshiper will sacrifice their life for the sake of drawing near to God. I have had a few times in my life where I literally could not stand – the weight of God's glory has been too heavy. This has always happened after periods of prolonged seeking and surrendering. It is the most awesome thing, the power of which is completely indescribable, but I'm sure that even then I have been just getting a tiny glimpse of who Jesus is.

The veil has been torn through Jesus our High Priest. God has made a way for us to be close to Him, as it was in the Garden of Eden. In this age, we still have free will. We can choose sin and self at any time, or we can choose selflessness and God's purpose. The more we choose God in our lives, our minds and our hearts, the closer we draw near. We are always as close to God as we want to be.

This is the way which God requires us to enter His presence. As we revere God, we go to Him on His terms, in faithfulness to Him rather than how we find acceptable. True sacrifice is the sacrifice that God requires, not what we are prepared to give, but what He demands.

Worship in the Spirit

“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”. (John 4:23.)

Jesus taught that true worship is in Spirit and truth, which also implies that worship that is not in Spirit is not worship that the father accepts. To be “in the Spirit” means that we are drawn into unity with Jesus by His Spirit. One of the roles of the Spirit is to reveal Jesus, and the more that we turn from our flesh and allow the Spirit to work in our lives, the greater our revelation of and unity with Jesus. Worship in the Spirit is not our fleshly attempt at singing a song with the words “Jesus” in, but it is worship that Jesus Himself consumes and abides in. It is worship that is led by and inhabited by Him. Because Jesus has sent His Spirit to reveal Him, we can be in unity with the worship of heaven and to bring that worship of heaven onto the earth. The work of the Spirit means that we can live in the fullness of the Kingdom of God now upon the earth, in every area we decide to sacrifice our own flesh in order to pursue Him.

True worship, that led by the Spirit, cannot be on our terms. It is not what we find

acceptable to give to God, it must be done as He ordains. Too often, we as Christians tell God what we find acceptable, what sort of church service we are willing to attend, what style of music we would like, how long the service should be, what sort of sermon we would like to hear, and so on. We tell God the terms on which we will follow Him. The truth is that church is not on our terms. It is not our church, it is His. Jesus says that He alone will build His church (Matthew 16:18.)

To worship in Spirit, we again must start from a point of brokenness. While we remain unbroken to the purposes of God, He cannot take over. When we try to minister on our own strength He is not ministering through us. Whenever we act out of our own ability or our own opinions, desires or ideas, then the Holy Spirit is not building His church, we are trying to build His church for Him. However, it will not really be His church, it will be our ministry. This will not set people free but chain them into religion, albeit religion that may look similar on the outside to the real things of God. We must be prepared to give our meetings and services over to Him, not just in word, but in action, too.

Looking at the analogy of the Tabernacle of Moses, the journey into the presence of God began in the flesh with singing and dancing, thanksgiving and celebration. To get in the Spirit, we may well start off in the flesh, and it is likely that a congregation will start from that place too. As we begin praising God out of a decision of obedience our flesh submits to the truth of God. Proclamation and praise is a powerful weapon to clearing the spiritual atmosphere and preparing ourselves to meet with Jesus.

As we surrender ourselves, the Spirit takes over His worship. Remember, without sacrifice, surrender and brokenness, there will be no true Spirit led worship. Worship that remains in the flesh stays in the outer courts, which may be fine in itself, but it isn't the true worship that the Father is looking for.

When we reach the point of worshipping in the Spirit, the Spirit of God leads, and He guides us wherever He wants. The worship leaders and the people become tools for Him to use, to sing, pray, prophecy, or to minister through, and we come into union with the worship of heaven. At this point, we have to be open to allow Him to do what He wants with us. Good leaders will not try to control the meeting with their own agenda, but at the same time they will not allow the meeting to be hijacked by the agendas of others. We must always keep the focus on God and what he wants to do, whilst resisting both our own desire to be in control, and also the will of others who may try to dominate the meeting. Freedom in church is a beautiful thing, but it requires God-focused shepherds who can protect the sheep and ensure the direction is God's alone, and that it is not waylaid by man desiring their own attention and glory.

As worshipers, we need to prepare our hearts and our lives to the point where we learn to walk in the Spirit as much as possible. My own preparation for a worship service does not consist so much of preparing songs or presentations, it consists of preparing myself first and foremost. I spend as much time as I can in that place of worship during my week, so that when I do lead worship, no matter how small a meeting it may be, I am able to

flow naturally with what I have seen and heard in the heavenlies. When it becomes time to lead others, I aim to be in a place where I can flow naturally with music into worship, and I allow whatever God wants to do to flow out of me. My worship in public is a very natural overflow of my relationship with God in private. From that point, others get drawn up in the worship. I lead people to talk, sing or engage with God in their own words, and I lead them through the process of worship, so that as they turn their hearts to God they will encounter Him. Very often spontaneous songs will flow out, which as they are given to us from God help to bring the people into a place of unity. Worship is different every time, because God is always doing something new with His people. He is a living, personal God, who does something specific with us whenever we come into His presence.

The best corporate worship times may start by being led by the worship leader, but will end up being taken over by the worship of the people as the people themselves enter into that unity with Jesus, and they become released to do whatever it is that God would have them do. If a time of worship is led correctly, the importance of the worship leader will diminish, as the worship flows more from the people than the worship team. We must always remember that above all, God desires personal encounter with His people, and this is what we lead people into.

Prayer in the Spirit

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Eph 6:18.)

We are not only called to have our worship in the Spirit, but all areas of our personal and corporate walk with God are called to have that same unity. We have seen how the temple, as well as being a place of worship, was also called to be a house of prayer. Our bodies are fulfillment of the temple in the Old Testament, as they now house the Holy Spirit in the same way as the temple did, and as we give our lives and churches over to worship they will also move in prayer.

It is worth noting that Paul uses the exact same phrase "in the spirit," about prayer as Jesus did about worship. The prayer that we move into as a people can only flow out of that place of unity with Jesus, a place of unity that flows from our worship. For our prayers to be effective they must be in unity with Jesus. As our lives and churches are given over to true worship, led by His Spirit, then true spirit led prayer will also be able to flow. This prayer will, as Jesus taught, truly pray in God's Kingdom upon the earth as in heaven (Matt 6:10.)

"Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit

desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you..." (Rom 8:5-9.)

Unity in the Spirit

When the people met to pray and worship in the New Testament, they also entered into real fellowship. His house, in addition to being places of worship and prayer, should also be a place of unity and of true fellowship. A church that is submitted to God will experience unity of the Spirit that Paul talks about in Ephesians, a unity that is so much deeper than any fleshly bond.

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all". (Eph 4:3-6.)

In a place that is not given over to the work of the Spirit, we may try to manufacture the good and right things of God in the flesh. We can try to force unity through our plans, yet we will never achieve true unity outside of our unity with Jesus. If our meetings with others are not given over to the work of the Spirit we will not be in unity with Jesus, and we will never be in correct spiritual unity with each other. True unity is a beautiful thing and major part of God's work, yet if we do not allow spirit-led worship in our lives we will never achieve unity with each other, and we will always be divided by our different viewpoints, agendas or desires.

Jesus is the only truth at any point in time or in any situation. What He is doing, saying, thinking, is the truth. Everything else is wrong. Every other opinion, decision, thought, etc. that He is not doing is incorrect, because He is the definition of truth. (*John 14:6*)

Therefore, wherever there is division amongst God's people it is not because of Jesus, but us. Each one of us has an opinion, a desire, a hope, a dream etc. Most of us operate, and are driven by those wills most of the time, even within the church. One has a desire to set this up, one has a desire to work one way, one has a desire for power, one has a desire to be left alone, one for money, one for success, one to be busy, one for peace and quiet etc.... This is our sinful, self-based nature, our desire to do what we want to do, our way. Sometimes this desire can even be for ministry or to set up ministries or outreaches. Just because it is a "Christian" based desire, it does not necessarily make it any more righteous or mean that it is Him that is doing it. A desire is only righteous if it comes from the Righteous One Himself.

There are so many different desires and beliefs within us all that these inevitably lead to conflict. From major world conflicts between different religions, beliefs or nationality questions, through to conflicts in the home between couples or children, to clashes in workplaces, right through to division both between and within churches. The causes of all of these conflicts is our sin and our selfish desire.

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you..." (James 4:1.)

These divisions form because of us following our internal desire for what we want, from a very small scale to a very big scale. Our "self" or sin causes division. We are driven by what we think is right, and by what we want. That is the sinful nature of man, that he thinks he knows what is best. This is the fruit of eating from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, this is what sin is - we know best, better than God. It is that which drives and motivates our every action and word.

However, at any one point any there is only one true way and one true word or action, and that is what Jesus is saying and doing. If there are 10 people in a room, each will have a different opinion or desire. Some of them may be similar, and they may come to an agreement by majority or by argument, but still there is only one truth - Jesus. Jesus is not democratic. He is not led by the weight of argument or by man's reasoning (He knows our hearts!) or by what man sees with his eyes. He is a King, and a Kingdom is led by His rule alone. Our job is to find that will and submit to it. The church should not be driven by our politics, but by His will. Where two people are united by His Spirit to Him, they will also be united to each other. This is "unity of the Spirit."

It is very important to realise that just because we are a Christian, it does not mean that we always know what He is doing or saying. There is a real danger in assuming that just because we are a Christian, His will is the same as our will, and He is behind what we do. It is not Jesus' job to support what we are doing, but our job to become a servant to what Jesus is doing. Jesus does not follow us, we follow Him. Every single church argument, from big to small comes because we assume that our will/way of seeing things is the right way. If we didn't think it wasn't the right way, we wouldn't think it. We must come to the point where we realise how wrong our way of thinking is, how wrong our ambitions are and how "fallen" our hearts are. Nothing is as deceptive as the human heart (Jer 17:9.) Only when we see that, can we begin to turn away from what we think is right (i.e. self-righteousness) and start seeking Him and finding out what He is saying, because His opinion is the only truth.

Jesus stated that his real family are the people who do the will of God: *"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."* (Mark 3:33.)

Jesus did not say that people who held the correct belief or theology were his family, or those who were Christians or Jews, or those who had an impressive ministry, but rather

those who do the will of God. Jesus states that true family unity comes from agreement with God, or to phrase it another way, his family are those who are in unity with God through the Spirit. The church will be in true unity only when we are in unity with Him, until then, there will always be division and fighting.

Being in unity, even a little bit (as none of us are completely) brings with it its own conflict. When we are aligned with Jesus' purposes in a situation, it will clash with the will of man. People will want something done one way, and yet Jesus says something different. As we stand for Jesus' purpose, the will of man will react against us, often accusing us as we don't do things man's way. Standing for Jesus' will may come across as arrogant and proud, because there is no compromise in it. When we are truly standing on the rock, we will not be moved by Man's will. This inevitably leads to clashes and accusation. However, our responsibility is to be so humble to Jesus, so uninterested in our own will that we only care about Him and His ways. This may look arrogant to the world and to those outside of that unity with Him, and yet it is actually the real definition of humility. This is why Jesus said that His coming will not bring peace, but division (Matthew 10:34.) It is also why one of Jesus' many titles is the "Rock of Offence" (1 Peter 2:8) Because Jesus' will and following it is an offence to the world, and unfortunately, often to those within the church too.

There will always be conflict between those not in unity with the Spirit and those who are in unity with Jesus, even within the church. We must also remember that none of us are in unity with Jesus all the time but the more we submit ourselves and seek Him, the more in unity with Him we will be.

As we grow in unison with Him, we grow in true unity with those who are also in unity with Him. My genuine family are those who also seek and long for His will and way and are willing to lay themselves down to find Him. I have had many encounters with people, sometimes complete strangers who I have known are my true family, and the love and respect I have for them burns with such passion. I know I will know these people for eternity, even if I never get to actually meet them properly here on Earth. This is not a fleshly unity, brought about by my efforts, but a unity brought about by being in Him. Like anything of God, it cannot be counterfeited or achieved by anyone's works or strengths, but by Him and Him alone.

When we walk in unity with Jesus through His Spirit we will naturally produce the fruits of the Spirit. In the same way that an apple tree cannot help but produce apples, a person who grows in unity with Him will naturally produce His fruit.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5 22-23.)

The fruits of walking with Him are not necessarily material things or earthly success, but are that which belong to His Kingdom. When we walk in unity with Jesus, we cannot help but to produce His genuine fruit. This fruit affects all areas of our lives, and we see the

blessings of who He is in us change our lives and the lives of those whom we have authority for, such as our families. The reality of what God does in our lives should be a very tangible reality, and we see this when our lives are lived in a true state of worship.

One of the differences between religion and true relationship is that though they may sound and act the same, the genuine produces genuine fruit.

“By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.” (Matthew 7:16-20.)

The Tabernacle of David - Restoring Worship

“In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be” (Amos 9:11.)

David also established his own tabernacle, but it was different in character to Moses'. In this tabernacle, David housed the Ark for 40 years until the temple was built in 964 BC. (See 2 Samuel 6, 1 Chronicles 13-16.) The Levites still ministered in David's tabernacle, and we can see in Chronicles and Samuel that it was a place of great rejoicing, of music, of singing, and of dancing. What is different about David's tabernacle compared to Moses' though, was that apart from the Ark, which contained God's presence, it did not house any of the other furniture that Moses had. Moses' tabernacle was essential, in that it was symbolic of what was to come, of Jesus' sacrifice and of the work of the Holy Spirit, but David's tabernacle was the fulfilment of that. David's tabernacle has sometimes been described as a New Testament church in the Old Testament.

“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.” (Psalm 51:16-17.)

The only sacrifice in David's tabernacle was the sacrifice of praise and the sacrifice of the heart. It was a true centre of worship, with God's presence being in the very midst of His people. Many of the Psalms were written prophetically in times of worship in the tabernacle. It was a place of praise and worship, prophecy, encounter, and the fullness of the presence of God. David understood that Moses' tabernacle was prophetic, it showed physically how things are to be done spiritually, but his tabernacle was to be the fulfilment of all that Moses prophesied.

In Amos 9:11, and again in Acts 15, God promises that he will restore David's tabernacle and rebuild it how it used to be. Jesus, and the sending of the Holy Spirit is part of the fulfilment of this prophecy. As His Spirit lives in us, we become those vessels for His

worship. I believe though that this prophecy also relates to what he wants to do with His body as a whole, to restore it to a place of Spirit filled worship and encounter with God.

The model of Davidic worship which David established in his tabernacle is that same model which God prophesies a restoration of in Amos 9. Where our churches have allowed religion and resistance to the purposes of God, He is restoring David's fallen tent, that place of unadulterated presence and glory.

When we look at any revival that has happened in history, they have been times of outpouring, where His Spirit, His will, and His glory dominate. All such revivals eventually peter out as we replace our hunger for God with tradition and religion, but I believe that it is God's desire that we and our churches are always in that state of enjoying real and life changing encounter with God. God always wants us to live our lives with that intimacy with Him, and the only things that stops us is not Him, but us.

New Wineskins

If we are going to see that fresh move that God wants us to see in our lives and in our churches, we are going to have to make changes to how we operate. If we do what we have always done, we will have what we have always had. Religion with an occasional encounter with God here and there is not enough for me, I want my whole life to be lived in unity with Him. I long to see our churches become those true centres of His glory and power, as they were ordained to be.

“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.” (Luke 5:37.)

When Jesus spoke about wineskins, He was again talking about us, the temples of God and carriers of His presence. In order for us to accept the new and deep work that God wants to do in our lives, we have to get rid of some of our old way of thinking and doing. We cannot simply add what God is doing on top of what we are already doing because, as this verse states, we will end up being damaged. For us to accept what it is that he wants to do both in our lives and in our churches we are going to have to have new wineskin mentality.

In practical terms, that means that some of our expectations about how we do church are going to have to change, and some of our routines are going to have to be abandoned. Man finds comfort in the familiar, and our wineskins soon become old and inflexible. This is how those revivals I mentioned did come to end; what starts out as Spirit soon turns into man's routine. The new wineskin becomes the old, and is incapable of receiving the new that God has for us. It is not wrong to continue in those ways as such, but it will mean that we are not open to the new that God wants to do, and we will therefore miss what he has for us.

To be a new wineskin, we must be prepared to get rid of any agenda or preconception that we have about how our worship should be and what our church agenda is, come back to seeking His face first and foremost, and allow Him to move as he wants to move.

That is, however, not to say that His church shouldn't be doing anything else but worshiping. As His body, we are called into many different areas, such as making disciples, pastoring, evangelizing, teaching, and so on, and all these activities are a vital part of the work that God has for us. The distribution of Jesus' authority to His people is crucial in seeing His will done upon the earth, but all those things that we rightly do, need to flow out of a place with unity with Him. If we give ourselves over simply to seeking Jesus' face with no agenda from that place of encounter and intimacy, He will command us, equip us and anoint us to doing His work. We can do the work that God commanded us to do in our own strength and use it to build religion, or we can allow His Spirit within us to accomplish that He would have us do. I know what it is to build church and ministry in my own flesh, and I have also seen how it may have looked successful to much of the church, but it was simply nothing more than me building my own Kingdom using Jesus' name.

In all that we do and say, in what we teach, what we sing, what we prophecy and what we reach out with, God wants us to carry His authority and His heart. When His Spirit has freedom to move within His church it will become the mightiest organisation that this earth has ever seen, just as God intended. It will become a genuine life changing force as it has been in times of revival in the past. As it is, His church is becoming increasingly marginalised within our societies, even to the point where it has become a figure of fun or disdain, because although it may have the right words and maybe even the right actions, it does that activity whilst carrying precious little of the Spirit of God that creates real change. Without His Spirit, we simply become another social club, but one that uses the name of Jesus.

It is when we turn our lives over to seeking Jesus' worth above ourselves and to walking in obedience and humility to Him that we will become those carriers of His presence and His heart. From that place, we will truly become the church that He intended us to be, the church that walks in unity with Him in the power of his Spirit. A church that allows Him to live and move through us will become true carriers of His Kingdom and transformation power.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14.)