

A vibrant sunset over the ocean, with the sun low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds, and the sun's rays create a shimmering path on the sea.

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[ONWARD] 2016
21 DAY FAST

DEVOTIONAL
week two

Day 8 // January 25

God's Favorite Song // Zion Alford

I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unending love and compassion. I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the Lord.

Hosea 2:19,20

I normally don't get nervous in front of large crowds. But this particular day I was incredibly nervous. I had to sing a song. And not just any song. A song I had written. A special song for a special person ... my bride.

I can still see her walking down the aisle adorned in the most beautiful white wedding dress I'd ever seen. A warm wave of peace and joy hit me every few seconds until she stood beside me.

My bride, Shannon, didn't know I'd written a song just for her, and I was going to sing it to her while gazing into her beautiful eyes. Just as the intro of the song finished and it was time for me to begin my awe-inspiring serenade, I became suddenly aware the microphone I was holding wouldn't reach my mouth. *Oh no, Shannon is standing on the microphone cord!* I thought, realizing it was too late to make any adjustments. So I sang, hunched over and bent at the waist. The crowd gasped in wonder, thinking I was too broken and humble to look her in the eyes as I sang my heart out. When I finally reached the musical bridge, I was able to rise up and whisper, "Get off the mic cord," to my teary-eyed bride. My untimely request must have startled her because she looked at me, bewildered and perplexed. I knew the song had probably rattled her, so I intensified my whisper and said again, "Get off the microphone cord! You're standing on it!" While she continued giving me a look of innocence, I gave several yanks on the cord. That's when I realized it. I had been standing on the cord all along! So much for my moving serenade! The whole place was laughing!

Throughout the Word of God, marriage is portrayed as an earthly representation of the spiritual marriage between us—the bride of Christ—and Jesus—the Bridegroom (Romans 7:4). Since I sang my love song to Shannon more than 20 years ago, we've learned a lot from our marriage that has helped us in our worship relationship with God. We've learned both a good, healthy marriage relationship and our worship relationship with the Lord must have three primary foundations: *kinship, fellowship, and intimacy*.

At our marriage ceremony, Shannon and I signed a certificate to prove we were making a covenant with each other. Although a piece of paper with a bunch of words and our signatures on the bottom doesn't define or guarantee a successful marriage relationship, it's important because it reminds me of the covenant I've made with God and with Shannon to love and cherish her forever. The day we signed that covenant, our kinship was established and we started our marriage journey. The day I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I did the same with Him. In that moment, I died to a law that said I was condemned to die for my sins and was made alive through His sacrifice. Jesus

died in my place, and His blood sealed the covenant between God and me. My worship journey—my relationship with Him—began that day, and my kinship was forever changed.

The second important foundation of worship is fellowship. Having received Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I'm able to enter into fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14). The Greek word for "fellowship" is *koinonia*, which means "participation, social interaction and partnership." The Holy Spirit is a person, and we have the opportunity to interact with Him 24 hours a day, seven days a week through conversation and communication. We all know every healthy marriage has healthy communication, and the same applies to our worship relationship with God.

A genuine, healthy, consistent prayer life is the most important foundation of our worship relationship with God. The third foundation of a healthy worship relationship with God is intimacy. In this intimacy, God imparts His love, life and likeness to us. Many mistakenly think this secret place of worship and intimacy is the entirety of worship; however, it's only one part of our worship relationship. If our whole worship relationship consists primarily of intimacy, we lose out on the true joys of having a fully functional relationship with our God. This is unhealthy and doesn't last, because our worship is solely based on the amazing feelings we get when we're in God's tangible presence. Our times of intimacy must be balanced with continual fellowship in order for our worship to be healthy.

God isn't looking for a girlfriend; He's looking for a bride. He's looking for someone willing to enter into covenant with Him, participate in continual fellowship with Him and share the intimacies of their heart with Him. These three foundations are essential for walking in a worship relationship with God. We must put them into practice, grow in them and, most of all, realize our relationship with God only begins at an altar. So get off the microphone cord and sing your life song to Him ... it's His favorite song.

activation **Memory Verse:** *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."* - John 4:24

- Remember the vows you made to the Lord when you first gave your heart to Him.
- Take time and fellowship with the Lord throughout the day. Remember, good communication is a two-way street. Spend as much time listening as talking.
- Be open to the intimacy of the Lord. Worship Him in private, and worship Him in the congregation. He loves to hear your heart!

prayer *Jesus, thank You for purchasing me with Your blood. Thank You for making it possible for me to have a personal, one-on-one relationship with God. Thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to comfort, guide and reveal the heart of God to me. Please lead me into a deeper, healthier relationship with God. Inspire my fellowship and help me to learn the secrets of the secret place. In Your name I pray, Amen.*

Day 9 // January 26

Honest Worship // Rebecca Pfortmiller

It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.

John 4:23,24

Take a few moments and imagine what a typical church worship experience might look like if you were to observe it from the outside.

You tentatively peer into the room and see an environment filled with people lifting their hands, singing songs exuberantly and expressing their love with all their might. Your eyes continue wandering across the room until they eventually come to rest on a few individuals who seem to stand out from all the rest. As you look at them, your heart slowly begins to stir, because there's something in their expression that's very different but still incredibly authentic. You surprisingly find yourself actually drawn into their worship.

And then, thoughts start swelling through your mind: *Why are they different? Do they know something about worship I don't?* After a moment though, you feel an overwhelming sense of peace settle your thoughts... and then you hear a still, small voice—the Holy Spirit. With gentle whispers to your heart, He begins to calm the questions in your mind.

I desire truth and sincerity... and deep down inside I teach you wisdom.

- Psalm 51:6

Then you hear His voice again.

I am near to all who call on Me... to all who call on Me in truth.

- Psalm 145:18

As you process through His words to you, the word truth rings out deep inside. You pause for a moment and ask the Holy Spirit if that's what He desires for you to hear. Suddenly, you feel a quickening in your heart assuring you this is what He's speaking to you. Something within you compels you to be bold. And so you ask Him: "Holy Spirit, will You search my heart and show me anything that offends You? And then, will You lead me along the path of truth and everlasting life?" (Psalm 139:23,24)

As the Holy Spirit responds to your plea, He is full of grace, but He is also honest. Conversations, images and thoughts all flicker through your mind. It's evident the Holy Spirit has done exactly what you asked Him to—He's revealing the things in your life that need to be cut out or given over to Him. But then the Holy Spirit starts encouraging you. And when you repent and ask for forgiveness, the sin that has been holding you back and hindering your worship is suddenly ... gone.

Worship is like a mirror—it reflects your relationship with God. It doesn't matter whether you're worshipping in public or you're worshipping in private, how you worship is a crystal clear thermometer that accurately reflects the depth and passion of your relationship with your heavenly Father. And when you have an open, honest heart, you know you can approach the throne of God with boldness and total freedom.

I feel like David mastered the art of utter honesty and truthful communication with God. If you read his psalms, you find every emotion from anger and confusion to trust and love, sometimes only a sentence apart and all expressed directly to God. David also worshipped God with that same kind of total abandon and honesty. He held nothing back. And the Bible describes him to be “a man after God’s heart.” David was a man who worshipped in truth.

I encourage you to take a page from David’s book. Don’t cover up or hide what you’re feeling from your heavenly Father. Follow David’s example... start expressing your heart openly and honestly as you worship your King.

activation **Memory Verse:** *“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” - John 4:24*

- What uncomfortable thoughts and feelings do you leave out of your worship and communication with God? Bring them before Him just like David did.
- As you practice truthful communication with God, listen to what He has to say and allow yourself to be shaped by

prayer *Lord, I want to worship You in honesty and truth. I bring You every part of my life—even the ugly parts—and lay them at Your feet. I submit my joys, successes, frustrations and failures to You. I want You to shape my life, so I trust in You and leave my life open before You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Day 10 // January 27

David's Uncontrollable Sweet Tooth // Kelly Allsopp

The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

2 Chronicles 16:9

Ice cream, candy bars, cotton candy, lollipops, doughnuts—what do these all have in common? Besides it being a fairly comprehensive list of all the things your dentist would beg you to avoid, it's also a list of things my daughters love to eat! And I'm not talking about the cute "I love my teddy bear" kind of love. Rather, it's the "think about it all the time, do whatever it takes to get it" kind of love. No matter how much it costs—good day or bad day, before breakfast or after—they will, without hesitation, joyfully fill their tummies with these things. Yes, I (along with many other parents) have come to the undeniable realization that my children have an uncontrollable sweet tooth. No teaching, training or convincing necessary. They can't help it. It's a part of them. It's just who they are.

This reminds me of someone in the Bible who also had an uncontrollable craving. But his craving wasn't for literal sweets; he craved the sweetness of the presence of God in his life. A man known for "*being a man after God's own heart*" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), a man known as the "*sweet psalmist of Israel*" (2 Samuel 23:1), a man who beautifully penned at least half the book of Psalms, a man who was both a warrior and a worshipper—David.

Many consider David to be the ultimate example of the ultimate worshipper. He was a passionate songwriter whose words still stir our hearts today, a skillful musician who drove away evil spirits as he played, a leader passionately absorbed with restoring the presence and glory of God back to its rightful place, a man who sacrificed burnt offerings every six paces and worshipped all the way to Jerusalem, a king who danced undignified and with all his might before his Savior, Shepherd, Sovereign Lord and King.

So what does it take to be a worshipper? To be known as a man or woman after God's own heart? It's not about being able to write beautiful songs. It's not about playing instruments. It's not about singing and dancing. It's not about impacting an entire nation like David did. Rest in this fact ... external actions do not define a worshipper— not even for David. The dictionary definition of worship doesn't involve singing, music, clapping, shouting, lifting hands or kneeling— although all these things can most definitely be an act of worship when they're done to lift up and adore the Lord. A worshipper is an individual who "regards one with adoring esteem, intense love and extreme devotion; loves unquestioningly and uncritically to the point of excess and extravagance, exceeding reasonable bounds." That's what it comes down to—awe coupled with profound honor.

God didn't call David a man after His own heart because of the psalms he wrote and the legacy they would leave. Acts 13:22 gives us the reason why:

“He [God] testified concerning him [David]: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything that I want him to do.’” This speaks much more of a life of obedience rather than a list of beautiful songs. The word “after” means “following continually, chasing, pursuing, craving, according to the nature and desires of, not hesitating.” These words define David the worshipper. And these same words can define you and me, too.

Worship wasn’t just something David did; it was the essence of how he lived. Worship wasn’t just something he loved to do; it was what he lived to do. No matter what was happening or where David was in his life—from forgotten shepherd boy to fugitive on the run to famous king—he *lived* worship. He lived it both in song and in obedience to everything the Lord asked him to do. He couldn’t help it. It was a part of him. It was just who he was.

Now *that* is the kind of sweet tooth we all should desire to have!

activation **Memory Verse:** *“Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.” - Psalm 63:3,4*

- Pray and ask God to teach you to be a true and passionate worshipper ... both in song and in obedience.
- Read the book of Psalms, especially the psalms David wrote (3–9; 11–32; 34–41; 51–65; 68–70; 86; 101; 103; 108–110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138–145. Psalm 2 is also identified by Acts 4:25 as being written by David, as is Psalm 95 by Hebrews 4:7).
- Pray for the boldness and courage to dance and worship the Lord like David did.

prayer *Father, thank You for this beautiful example and picture of what a true worshipper really looks like. Thank You for gifting us with the passionate and truthful psalms that David wrote to You. Thank You for the revelation that worship isn’t all about songs and music. Thank You for showing us the life that David lived—one of obedience, trust and intimate relationship with You. Thank You for being the kind of Father and God who is worthy of our worship, awe and adoration in every moment of every day. Teach us to be like David—one who worships and obeys all that You ask us to do no matter what circumstances we face, no matter how wonderful or difficult things may be, no matter where we are in life—whether in the field, in the cave or in the palace. Let us be known by You and all those around us as a man or woman “after God’s own heart—someone who does all You want us to do.” Let us leave the next generation the kind of legacy that David left for all who would follow him. Let us always passionately pursue You in every single aspect and moment of our lives. Give us an uncontrollable sweet tooth and craving for Your presence and for worshipping You with everything within us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Day 11 // January 28

All Together Now // Cody Carnes

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.

1 Corinthians 1:10

Have you ever watched someone run lights for a concert? Watching the hands of one person push a few faders up and down to control an entire stage of hundreds of lights at one time is fascinating. It's often a time-consuming and meticulous process to set the lights up, plug them in, and focus them on the precise spots they need to illuminate. But once they're connected to the source and operating in unity exactly as they were designed to, they create a beautiful picture and transform the entire atmosphere.

Unity is powerful and valuable. The Bible says where there is unity, *"that's where God commands the blessing, ordains eternal life"* (Psalm 133:3). Wow. God must really want to see His church unified.

So how do we live in unity when we're all so different? How is it possible to relate to everyone around us without any conflict? When I read scriptures about unity, I see one all-important, consistent factor—the Holy Spirit. I don't think unity has as much to do with how we connect to each other as it does with how we connect one-on-one with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:3 says: *"Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."* When my first focus is unity with the Holy Spirit, I am automatically bound together with everyone else who is also unified with the Spirit. Because we're all connected to the same source, unity comes naturally. When we focus on yielding and submitting our lives to the Holy Spirit, He brings us together.

And just like lights do at a concert, unity in the Body of Christ creates a beautiful picture and can transform any atmosphere. I love the way Paul describes unity in 1 Corinthians 12:

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit ... If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it.

- 1 Corinthians 12:12,13,17,18 (emphasis added)

Being a unified body doesn't mean we all operate exactly the same, look the same way or live out the same calling. It means we're all connected to the same "brain"—the Holy Spirit. Just like our brains communicate with our hands and

tell them to move, the Holy Spirit communicates with us. When we obey, we can confidently walk in what we were created to do.

What's more, our obedience is actually worship to the Lord. Colossians 3:14 says: *"Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."* When we express our love to our heavenly Father by obeying Him, we are actually worshipping. And the more we worship, the more we love the way God loves. It's a cycle of increasing unity. In the midst of our unique and purposeful differences, we are united with God's heart and therefore united with each other.

Jesus prayed for us to have this kind of unity in John 17:21–23:

"I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me."

Let's be the church Jesus prayed for. Let's live in unity and change the atmosphere. It starts right here, right now ... with you and me. Let's connect with the Holy Spirit daily, obey Him, worship Him with everything we have and love the people around us the way He loves them.

activation

Memory Verse: *"Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name."* - Psalm 63:3,4

prayer

Father, thank You for showing me the power of unity. I want the church to be what You've created it to be, and I understand it starts with me. I want to keep my focus on You. I want to walk side by side with You every second of my life. Continue to show me who I am. Continue to teach me how to worship and show me how to love the people around me the way You do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 12 // January 29

A Psalm for Every Occasion // Robb Brewer

Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.

Psalm 63:3,4

I couldn't see. Fog clouded my mind. The sounds around me echoed with chaos. My awakening slumber felt heavy, calling me to return. As daylight flooded my eyes, I started to remember what was happening. Only hours before, or perhaps it was days—my sense of time was far gone—a doctor had pronounced I was dying. They had discovered my heart lacked the strength to pump blood through my body. I was in an ICU, and the medical team was trying to save me. Machines beeped, buzzed and whirred declaring their never-ending alliance for health. My deep sleep was medically induced, and I surfaced only occasionally to remind everyone I was still alive.

I have no idea how many times I went through this wake/sleep pattern. I remember sometimes a nurse called my name. Other times, I felt my wife's tears rolling down my cheek. But the sounds of the ICU always remained. The machines never stopped. On one such awakening, however, an added sound was introduced to the atmosphere. It was the sound of life. I heard worship masking the hum of machines. During my slumber, a friend had turned on a worship CD. The music I heard spoke hope; the words echoed salvation. At each awakening, I found my heart more and more encouraged. Eventually, I was completely healed. The Lord restored strength to my physical heart, but my recovery process was long and I bathed each day in worship.

When we go through difficult days, worship can be a faithful shield. But how exactly does worship provide life in dark seasons? I have three thoughts.

WORSHIP IS DECLARATION: In the Old Testament, we see the prophet Jeremiah crying out: *"Heal me, O Lord and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved, for You are my praise"* (Jeremiah 17:14). When facing challenging moments, we tend to look for hope. In those times, often any hope will do—the secure nod of a trusted doctor or the touch of a faithful friend. But God is our ultimate hope, and what He declares can never be defeated. Your heart will always be encouraged when you join His chorus and declare what is already true: *"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed"* (Isaiah 53:5). When we worship, we not only worship the source of healing and salvation, we declare—as Jeremiah did—the truth of what God has already completed, and our hearts are infused with hope.

WORSHIP CONNECTS US TO SALVATION: Whenever I'm facing challenging circumstances, my typical first prayer is: "Lord, please get me out of this mess!" I want the situation to end as quickly as possible. I don't want to strengthen my character. I'm not interested in developing perseverance. I just want to be saved. Any salvation will do—even an imperfect one. Worship, however,

connects us to the Source of perfect, lasting salvation. He alone can deliver. In 2 Samuel 22, we see David's first response after being delivered from his enemies was to praise God: *"I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies"* (2 Samuel 22:4). There is no greater source of salvation than the voice of God. And as we make worship the first response to difficult days and situations, our hearts turn away from our selfish solutions and towards God's voice.

WORSHIP IS OPPOSITION: Difficult days tend to wear a person down. Over time we begin to gripe and complain just like the Israelites did when they left Egypt. Our mouths can unintentionally fill with words that neither lift our heart nor change the circumstance. Worship opposes the unhealthy syllables we murmur during dark seasons. Once again, we can learn from David's example. During a difficult season of hardship and persecution, David sang these words of praise: *"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth"* (Psalm 34:1). When we continually declare God's praises with our hearts and lips, words of defeat have absolutely no room to prosper.

activation **Memory Verse:** *"Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name."* - Psalm 63:3,4

- Reflect on previous crisis moments in your life. What was your normal first response? What changes can you make to become a worship-first responder? How might you help others learn to worship when they face a crisis?

prayer *Lord, thank You for how worship empowers me to overcome my crisis. With my mouth, I will adore You. Your praise shall continually be on my tongue. I know Your declarations for me overwhelm anything the Enemy would speak against me, so I let those truths resonate from my voice. You alone are the source of my salvation, and in You alone will I trust. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Day 13 // January 30

Strengthened Affection // Misti Presley

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your
iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so
that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Psalm 103:1-5

Have you ever found yourself in a place where you just didn't feel like worshipping? Maybe you were in the midst of some storms in your life. Maybe you were just feeling a little tired or apathetic. For whatever reason, you were saying the words of worship with your lips, but you couldn't bring yourself to really mean them with all your heart. In Matthew 15:8, Jesus said: *"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."* The fact that Jesus addressed this topic in Scripture lets us know we're not alone in this challenge. John Telman writes, "It's not the beauty and greatness of God that is at fault. The problem lies in our weakened sense of affection toward God." So how do we go from "not feeling like it" to "worshipping God in spirit and in truth"?

Recently, as I was serving with Gateway's worship team, I looked out at the people worshipping and realized *I was beholding the glory of God!* As we sang out: "Redeemer, my Healer, Lord Almighty, Defender, my Savior, You are my King," hands were raised throughout the sanctuary. I had the incredible privilege of witnessing how the Lord had moved and was moving so beautifully and intimately in the lives of *His* children. I marveled in wonder and thought: *Lord, look at what You have done!*

At another recent worship service, we spent the evening focused on being grateful. Everyone in the congregation wrote down testimonies of what the Lord had done in their lives and brought them to the altar. People came down in droves and decorated the altar with their gratefulness. The altar was covered in His glory. Once again, I thought: *Lord, look at what You have done!*

Together, we declare *His goodness, His faithfulness, His love, His compassion and His grace.* We unite as children grateful to a faithful Father who provides for us during a job loss; a healing Father who cures our sickness; a compassionate Father who sets us free from addiction; a redemptive Father who restores our marriages and a loving Father who gives us salvation, grace, forgiveness and purpose. The stories of each individual are as unique as each of our fingerprints. Our individual worship rising up as a burnt offering to the Lord is flavored by our individual experiences, our hurts, our joys, our memories, our losses, our God-given DNA, our thankfulness ... our testimonies.

Because we're each so unique, when we join together in worship, we transform into a beautiful symphony serenading our Healer, our Redeemer and our Savior. Just as an instrument that isn't being played in an orchestra can affect the sound, so can our unwillingness to worship affect the fullness of this

symphony. Each one of us is an instrument He created and designed; we are “fearfully and wonderfully” made. God is the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9–14), so He already knows the origin of our worship. God is well aware I’m not bringing what I alone have to bring when I’m simply going through the motions of worship or trying to worship like someone other than who He created me to be.

Psalm 148 draws a beautiful picture of creation praising God. The heavens, stars, sun, moon, earth, animals and people—all being called to praise. But out of those created things, we alone have free will. The sun and moon can’t help but shine and praise God in doing what they were created to do, but we get a choice. We alone can sing the song of the redeemed. So when we withhold that praise, we become a missing piece of the symphony of creation. The thought of all of creation honoring the Lord in their unique worship is overwhelming to me. And doesn’t He solely deserve all of it?

I am a sinner who God saved by grace while I was in the midst of my sin. God looked past every reason I gave Him to not love me, and He loved me anyway. So how do I worship when I don’t feel like it? I remember the love He showed me, the love He continues to show me, and I remember the pit He rescued me from. I look at who I am versus who I was, and I can’t help but take my unique place in creation—with my unique song of redemption—and join in the symphony of praise to my God who is worthy!

activation

Memory Verse: “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits ...” - Psalm 103:1,2

- Take some time to remember where the Lord found you, all He’s done for you and who He is.
- Make it a priority to soak in His Word.
- Ask the Lord if there’s anything in your life causing distance between you and Him.

prayer

Lord, You are a beautiful and wonderful Father. Forgive me for withholding my worship from You. Your goodness, faithfulness and worthiness do not depend on my feelings or circumstances. Lord, help me to remember all You’ve done for me. Help me not to get complacent in my relationship with You. Help me to continually seek after You like the treasure You are. You helped me and saved me because of Your unfailing love. Now may the world see Your hand at work in my life (Psalm 109:26,27). Lord, look at what You have done. We are bearers of Your glory! Receive all the honor and glory that is due to You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

The Transforming Power of Prophetic Worship // Tim Sheppard

Prophecy and worship, when mixed together, set off a supernatural reaction that is both gloriously contagious and transformational. Shortly before getting crowned as the very first king of Israel, Saul personally experienced the power of prophetic worship. After anointing Saul's head with oil, the prophet Samuel told him:

You will meet a band of prophets coming down from the altar on the hill. They will be playing a harp, a tambourine, a flute, and a lyre, and they will be prophesying.

At that time the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you with power, and you will prophesy with them. You will be changed into a different person. - 1 Samuel 10:5,6

God's people have worshipped prophetically for thousands of years. Miriam the prophetess grabbed a timbrel and launched into a spontaneous song of victory after God parted the Red Sea and delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian captivity (Exodus 15:20,21). In 1 Chronicles 25:3, the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun were appointed to "*prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals.*" Elisha called for a harpist, and while the harpist played, the power of God came upon him and he prophesied (2 Kings 3:15). The Psalms are also filled with examples of prophetic worship.

So what makes worship "prophetic?" Some people think prophecy is limited to foretelling the future and only those who have the gift of prophecy can participate. However, at its core, prophecy is simply seeing people and circumstances as God sees them and then participating with Him through words and actions to encourage His intended outcome in and through them. Revelation 19:10 says "*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" In other words, prophecy at its essence reveals Jesus Christ. The result is people are drawn to Jesus, whether through declaring what is to come (foretelling) or what is (forth telling). In this sense, *everyone* can prophesy. A simple word of encouragement can be very prophetic by giving courage to someone to pursue God's purpose. The intention is to edify, exhort and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3).

So now that you know you can prophesy, you're probably wondering how you worship *prophetically*. It's important to realize that prophetic worship shouldn't be recognized by a form, style or manner of expression, but rather by God's unction. The dictionary defines unction as "an act of anointing." And in this context, it's God's supernatural anointing on the expresser, the *expression* and the *impact* that *occurs* when we obey the Holy Spirit's prompting to cooperate with Him in orchestrating a God-moment in worship. Whether we're leading or following, our obedience requires faith and courage. The risks seem high, but the results defy human explanation and the rewards are eternal.

The difference between worship with God's unction and worship without it is determined by whether or not a worshipper is close enough to God to hear His whispers. Your effectiveness as a true prophetic worshipper isn't reliant on your creative talent or human skill but rather on your willingness to be intimate with the Holy Spirit and yielded to Him.

During a service I was at recently, the musicians on the worship team began playing a simple chord progression. As the congregation began to sing a new song to the Lord—each person singing their own words—a deeper sense of God’s holiness and peace settled on us. After a while, the musicians stopped playing and only voices could be heard. For several minutes, the congregation continued to lift a glorious groundswell of praise without direction from the platform. The sound and impact of it felt like it was from another world. The worship team kept waiting for the sound to fade, but it didn’t. In that moment, I thought to myself: “This must be what heaven is like.”

The manner of expression—in this case, spontaneous singing—didn’t define that worship moment as prophetic; God’s unction did. Though worshipping prophetically can include spontaneous singing, it’s not marked by either being spontaneous or prewritten, new or old, boisterous or silent, spoken or sung, vocal or instrumental, moving or still. Rather, it is marked by God’s unction. It may range from dance to painting to a direct word a single leader sings over a person to all points in between; but ultimately, prophetic worship is a fascinating journey into exploring and expressing the heart of our great God.

God has given us a limitless variety of creative expressions to respond to His greatness and declare our love. And He is inviting every one of us to go with Him to a higher place by taking a deeper plunge into His limitless depths. It’s time to unlock your potential as a prophetic worshipper. Take courage. Step up in faith and dive in! You’ll find that the waters are deep, rich, engaging and transforming.

activation **Memory Verse:** *“Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits ...” - Psalm 103:1,2*

- Ask God to give you a greater sensitivity to His voice. Eliminate the noise in your life that keeps you from hearing Him. And then, when you feel that God is speaking to you, act upon it. Greater obedience will cultivate a greater ability to hear.
- Stay in God’s Word. By daily reading and meditating on the Word, you will understand what God’s voice sounds like and be guarded and guided by His truth.
- Begin to express your love to God outwardly in ways you never have before. Whenever a leader encourages you to move in prophetic worship, jump right in without hesitation. As you step out in faith, you will experience new levels of freedom in your life.
- Take your place in congregational worship leadership by fully engaging in corporate worship. As you worship, your enthusiasm and freedom will encourage others to also let their worship reflect God’s greatness.

prayer *Lord, thank You for the creative freedom You’ve given us to express our love to You. I want to be fluent in the language of praise. I reject any old ways of thinking that would hold me back from expressing my love to You. I turn away from the fear of man and take courage to dive in to the fullness of prophetic worship. Free my lips, my hands, my feet and everything within me to worship You in spirit and truth. I choose to be a prophetic worshipper because I want to declare my love to You in deeper ways. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

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