

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. <sup>24</sup>God  
is spirit, and his worshipers must  
worship in spirit and in truth.

Jesus, John 4:23-24 niv

and

### **The Prostitute Bride**

An uncomfortable allegory

For personal and group study

by: Ken Stoltzfus (Sr.)

## **The True Worshipers**

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### **Please contact me with your comments and questions**

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Sometimes folks read an introduction,  
and sometimes they don't.  
Please do!

## Introduction

*But as it is written, "Things that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined, the things that God has prepared for those who love him." <sup>10</sup> These are the things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God. I Cor. 2:9-10, see [I Cor. 2:6-12](#), or better yet read [the whole chapter](#).*

Can you feel that insistent “something” inside of you that begs for significance? For purpose, affirmation, approval, and meaning in life?

That is the human spirit, the part of you that was formed in the image of God, and it craves relationship with Him. It longs to be what you were created to be, but haven’t been because of the sin nature that we all inherited from Adam.

*Whatever, or whoever* we give ourselves to as we attempt to satisfy that insatiable hunger, becomes an object of worship. It’s not very complicated.

THE TRUE WORSHIPERS defines what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth and describes the life that follows. It assumes our literal and life-changing spiritual rebirth and our transfer into a different spirit kingdom than we were in by default. ([Col. 1:13-14](#), [Acts 26:18](#))

The heart that worships God will declare Him and the life He offers to be superior to Satan’s options in every aspect of life. Contentment, joy and success are now measured by the quality of our relationship with Him. *He* becomes the answer to life’s questions. *He* becomes our source for the cravings of the empty soul. *That* is worship.

It is worshipping God in Spirit and in truth that opens the door to “*things that no mind has imagined, the things that God has prepared for those who love him.*” Such worship is rarely taught with insight and few American Christians experience it or benefit from the abundant life that follows. We prefer to focus on our distinctive doctrines; on worldly applications of spiritual truths; and on trying to “obey the rules” enough to go to heaven when we die.

Part of the problem is that we have a pauper’s view of what God intends for us in our years on earth, which includes all that Paul wrote of above and in [Eph. 1:18-20](#), [Philip. 1:9-11](#) and [Col. 1:9-12](#). Escaping hell and going to heaven when we die is *not* the crowning jewel of Christianity - it is intimacy with Creator God now and forever. We enter that through worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

We are adopted into our Father’s family and Jesus calls us “Friend.” We are soul-mates with all, everywhere and in all time, who are in the flock that Jesus prayed for in John 17. This is what we were made for! Earthly success and treasure become distracting and unappetizing options when the righteousness, peace and joy of [Rom. 14:17](#) replace them.

Such life would be more appealing if “the word of the cross” ([I Cor. 1:18-30](#), [Lk. 9:23-26](#)) wasn’t part of the journey - but it is. The uncomfortable truth is

that to worship God in spirit and in truth implies to lay our pride and self-will on the altar as living sacrifices ([Rom. 12:1-2](#)).

I write for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness - those whom Jesus spoke of in [Mt. 5:6](#) - and I pray that includes you. These thoughts come out of deep heart-searching as I read the Word; observe my own life and that of others; and listen for His voice.

I am propelled by the knowledge of *“the secret truth that was hidden for ages and for generations, but has now been revealed to those who believe in him.”* <sup>27</sup> *It is to them that God wanted to make known the riches of the glory of this secret truth among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* <sup>28</sup> *This is he whom we proclaim. We admonish every person, and we teach every person with all wisdom, so that we may present every person complete in Christ.* <sup>29</sup> *For this I labor and strive according to his energy that is at work in me in power.”* [Col. 1:26-29](#) I cannot be silent as I see so many in the Church, including leaders, giving themselves to other than “Christ in us, the hope of glory.”

I also write out of a pervasive sense that “troubles” lie ahead for American Christians and that we are not prepared to be faithful to God and to each other in that time. The solution lies in the worship of God in spirit and in truth.

If THE TRUE WORSHIPERS seems radical to you, please ask yourself why that is. Is it possible that what is presented here is “normal” according to God’s plan, but “radical” because of the measure to which we have redefined “Christian” so that we can more freely indulge our earthly affections?

I find the allegory THE PROSTITUTE BRIDE to be disturbingly poignant. I hope you are gripped by the tension between it and THE TRUE WORSHIPERS.

*“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.”* <sup>38</sup> *He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’* Jesus, John 7:37b-38

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* Jesus, John 10:10

## 1 – Worship Is - -

*You must have no other gods before me. Exodus 20:3*

*As the deer pants after streams of water, so I thirst for you, God. <sup>2</sup>I thirst for God, for the living God, when will I come and appear before God? Psa. 42:1-2*

*However, the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to be his worshipers. <sup>24</sup>God is Spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24*

### **In the Garden**

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve gave themselves fully to God. They walked with Him and communicated without hindrance and were secure and complete in every way through that relationship. Their “insides” were at peace. They had LIFE\* to the fullest and felt no need of any kind. Try to imagine that! And try to believe that this was, and is, God’s intention for mankind.

This communion with God is an essential ingredient of human wholeness and of what we call “fulfillment,” just as grapes are essential to grape juice. Without grapes, juice cannot be grape juice. Without unhindered fellowship with God, man cannot be fully man. Creator God made it so!

### **Humanity’s Primal Instinct**

Worship is the act of giving oneself to *someone* or *something* from whom or from which we expect to receive LIFE. LIFE includes human essentials such as significance, identity, purpose, provision, security and the sense of well-being.

It is these, which bring a sense of wholeness to humans. By creation design we are compelled to receive them from a source greater than and outside of our humanity. There is no such thing as “self fulfillment” if those words mean fulfilling our soul hunger from within ourselves.

Worship is the most primal instinct of humankind. It is as universal as the sunrise; as unavoidable as our need for food; as natural as a newborn sucking on its mother’s breast; and as compelling as our instinct for survival.

This captivating need for a god is a common denominator of “man” regardless of gender, social status, education, wealth, religion or anything else that distinguishes us as individuals. Every culture, even the “natives” in the most remote jungles, have their form of a god because there is this irresistible instinct within man, even depraved man, which demands help from outside of himself.

This need is evidence of the longing of the spirit of man for communion with his Creator. It is the power behind the “there must be something more” voice that we all hear, and inspires the myth that “If I only had *that*, I would be satisfied.”

Every human lives a life of worship, even if subconsciously. All worship a god, but not all worship God. Accepting that premise is a prerequisite to benefitting from this study – *and* to receiving the rich LIFE that God has for you through our Lord Jesus.

### **After the Apple**

When sin came into the world, Adam and Eve's communion with God was severed and they lost their source of LIFE. They were no longer complete and secure. Their identity and sense of significance were gone!

Emptiness was formed in their soul – a void that demanded to be filled because God had created them with a need for relationship with one greater than themselves!

Man now became possessive and greedy in an attempt to fill that void. The frantic attempts of men to accumulate wealth, or to achieve power or fame, show how desperate they are for wholeness. Actually, sin of *every* kind is simply the expression of man's craving to fill the cavern in his innermost being!

Overeating is more closely related to inner soul hunger than to the stomach. Immorality, stealing, lying and even gossip betray how driven we are to feel more complete and more significant as a human being – even at the expense of others.

Anything that we must have in order to feel whole, and the real or imagined loss of which threatens that wholeness, can become an object of worship. Our comfort, security, power, position, money, possessions, hobbies, work, ministry, and our figure, hair and looks in general, can all become objects of worship. Our pursuit of LIFE through them is like a bird flailing on the ground with a broken wing.

### **God's Warning**

We know that Israel was warned against following other gods, as in the First Commandment in Exodus 20:3: *You must have no other gods before Me.*

And Deut. 8:19 is a strong message: *It will happen that, if you will forget Yahweh your God and walk after other gods, worship them, and reverence them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish.* Many Christians find it hard to acknowledge that there might be other gods in their life. They just don't think they're capable of such a thing! But if there were not other gods in this world, why did God so clearly warn us against worshipping them? Obviously, there *are* other god-options and they are not all carved from stone!

### **A Religious Duty**

Mankind is the highest form in God's creation on the earth, but we are not the highest form in the universe. We are subject to a higher power – we cannot rule ourselves. There are two options for that and all we get to decide is which one we will serve. ([Rom. 6:16](#))

Consider Mt. 4:9-10, and Satan's brazen invitation to Jesus to worship him: "*He said to him, 'All these things I will give you, if you bow down and worship me.'*" <sup>10</sup> *Then Jesus said to him, 'Go away from here, Satan! For it is written, 'You will worship the Lord your God, and you will serve only him.'"*

The Greek word that is translated “worship” there, means to bow oneself to a divine being. The word “serve” has the sense of fulfilling a religious service to God or to the gods.

Satan knows, and Jesus confirmed, that we humans are predestined to bow to, and fulfill a religious service to a god, and it is either God or Satan. Much of life has potential to express our subservience to one or the other. Grasping this truth is foundational to understanding ourselves; our struggles in life; and what it means to be a true worshiper of God.

\*I use “LIFE” to represent the fullness and wholeness that we have through relationship with God, and “life” to speak of human existence in a more general way.

### **Personal and Discussion Questions**

1. Do you recognize within yourself the deep inner hunger that is described in this chapter?
  
2. In what measure does Psalm 42:1-2 represent you?
  
3. Why do humans so passionately pursue money and power? Why does sex have such capacity to capture men and women?
  
4. What are some attitudes we can embrace to help us enjoy the things God gives us for our enjoyment, without allowing them to become a god to us?
  
5. Circle the word/s that express your response to the last section, “A Religious Duty?”  
It is - -

Simplistic	Enlightening	Impractical	Overstated
Instructive	Provocative	Convicting	Condemning

## 2 - Like a Little Puppy

THE CALL and THE WORSHIP OF SURRENDER came to me in 1985 as I was contemplating the meaning of worship in preparation for teaching in our church. Please judge them according to God's Word. If He confirms that they represent His heart, invite them to speak to *your* heart.

As you do, picture yourself beckoning a malnourished puppy to come and take food from your hand. You so badly want to feed it and give it the care it needs, but it is frightened and stays at a safe distance. You can tell it wants to come but so far it hasn't trusted you enough. There is something about the little guy that is appealing, and you keep trying – just like God does with us.

### The Call

My desire for worship springs from the very core of My being.  
 I have made you.  
 I have given you life.  
 Your life flows forth from My life.  
 I call you to come back to Me,  
 To find your life in My life.  
*That is worship!*

To whatever or whomever you look as your source of life,  
 to that you give worship.

That which becomes the object of your hearts search,  
 that you worship.

That which you would embrace and cling to;  
 fearing that without it you would lose the meaning of life,  
 to that you offer worship.

That which most warms your heart by its presence,  
 or the assurance of it's coming;  
 or leaves you feeling cold and lifeless in it's absence,  
 or the fear of it's loss,  
 to that you bow in worship.

You worship.  
 You will worship.  
 I have made you to worship.  
 You cannot refuse to worship,  
 But you chose the object of your worship.  
**I call you - - to worship Me!**

## The Worship of Surrender

Every human worships.

Man was created with a need to worship someone (or something) greater than  
and beyond himself

Worship carries with it the expectation of reward,  
the sense of connecting with someone (or something) that will make us whole.

In worship, man offers up his heart,  
his life, allegiance, and affections,  
to God, or a god.

Man's highest calling,  
and his highest privilege,  
is to commune with God in worship.

No other part of creation can commune with God.

A human is fully human only when he worships God.  
God would say; "When you worship me, the life that is in me flows to you."  
Without that life, man is incomplete.

God seeks those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth.  
That is, in humility and sincerity, without reservation or pretense;  
in all of life, whether a "worship service" or a surrendered heart in work,  
play or family settings

He seeks those who will lay their lives down and yield their spirits up,  
to receive LIFE through His life,  
rather than through their own

By exalting Him as their Source,  
and giving Him that place in their life,  
they worship Him;  
because whatever becomes man's source,  
becomes his object of worship

cont'd



### 3 – The True Worshipers

*Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, that an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> However, the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to be his worshipers. <sup>24</sup> God is Spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:21-24*

*"God is Spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth* is one of the most radical lines in all of scripture. It stands in stark contrast to the way God had related to His people in the 4,000 years since the fall of man, and introduces a revolutionary and foundational component of authentic Christian faith.

If we are to worship God in spirit and truth, it signals that our spirit has been made alive again and that our spirit-to-spirit communion with God has been restored – and *that* has everything to do with what it means to be "Christian."

New Testament worship is no longer a matter of time, place, form, ritual or priestly function. It transcends the former political and geographical definitions of what it meant to be the people of God. Incredibly, the Spirit of God was previously *with* or *upon* those who loved God – but is now *in* us. ([John 14:17](#))

Worship was previously shaped around the limitations of fallen man but was now to be patterned after the nature of God. God is spirit and as we enter into relationship with Him, through Jesus Christ, our worship is more in the spiritual sphere and less of the body and soul.

Please forgive my faltering attempt to define what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth, and take these thoughts as a starting point, not as conclusive.

#### **Worship in Spirit**

We worship in spirit:

- when we worship in harmony with God's spirit nature and in accordance with His plan that we come directly to Him through Jesus;
- when we don't try to earn his favor by using form or ritual;
- when we lay down the interests of the mind, will, emotions and body and enter into His presence without baggage, demands, or instructions to Him.

When We Worship in Spirit:

- we experience spiritual interface with Him as our spirits are co-joined, His LIFE flows into our spirit and we are filled to running over with His presence;
- He gives us identity, significance, purpose, security, a sense of well-being and unexplainable personal joy, and;
- the light of His presence shines in us and through us, bearing testimony to His goodness and making us fruitful in serving Him.



## 4 – Worship, in the Bible

Worship is the most central theme of the Bible. We were created to worship, and God’s Word starts by telling how Adam and Eve found fullness of personhood through intimacy with Him. Sadly, the story of the fall follows, but fortunately the rest of the Bible is the account of God’s intervention on our behalf. Truly, it’s all about worship!

God placed a deliberate plan in motion in [Gen. 3:15](#) and it continues through the book of Revelation. It reveals the contest between God and Satan for the affection of men’s hearts (worship), and tells how God made a way for humans to again find wholeness through intimate fellowship with Him. It was the costliest transaction in history

It would be helpful if Christians viewed the Bible as God’s instruction manual on how to come back into relationship with Him, and how to live well, instead of seeing it as legalistic “do’s and don’ts.” He knows what it takes for us to be deeply satisfied and to be full of joy and at peace in every situation. He created us, and He knows that such LIFE can only come through worshipping Him, so He gave us “the Good Book” to tell us all about it.

As a flight instructor, I taught my students many “rules” that were based on the realities of physical laws. We talked about the law of gravity; the principle of gyroscopic action; Bernoulli’s law and more. I did it so they could fly safely even in very challenging circumstances – and enjoy doing so. Pilots who ignore those rules will wreck airplanes and sometimes they die.

It’s much the same in seeking human wholeness in an environment that is hostile to God. In creation He established “rules of life” such as love, forgiveness, purity, self-control and more, and Proverbs is full of them. Accepting them leads to LIFE but ignoring them produces brokenness. Consider [Deut. 30:15-20](#). The Bible, God’s Word, tells us clearly what works and what doesn’t.

The one who worships God will declare that His way is good; will seek to know and understand the scriptures; and will submit himself to them. Such an approach creates a mindset that opens one to understanding and insight. It gives new light to many scriptures that are hard to understand when considered from the standpoint of our old nature and its fleshly, physical and soulish interests.

### **The Psalms as Worship**

Read the Psalms as the testimony of one who found LIFE in God. Many of them declare His sufficiency in the challenges of life. They candidly reveal the tension between our broken humanity and the heart that truly loves God.

Don’t just interpret them as a Christian who has received salvation through Jesus so you escape hell when you die. Read them as communicating with One who is infinitely superior to you, yet a totally understanding and loving friend. The One who knows you best but loves you most. The One whose acceptance of you has power to make life good. Power to quiet your restlessness and give you

peace regardless of the storm. The One who wants to become your “all” if you will only let Him. To make you content, regardless of what you have or don’t have. *That* is the God of the Psalms. Give yourself to Him – worship Him.

Read Psalm chapters 1 - 25 and make them your own words. Picture yourself lying on a grassy hillside looking into the blue sky above, declaring [Psalm 19](#) to the One who longs for intimacy with you. We crave intimacy, yet we fear it because it implies being known and we don’t trust others to love and accept us if they know us. David was able to press through that, and to be candid with God about his humanity and trust Him to still love and accept him. That is a high form of worship and it is ours if we chose it.

Dare to let the words of [27:1](#) and [vv13-14](#) lead you into similar declarations of praise and worship. Surrender your will, pride and emotions to God and see what it does to your inner person. It will give you a fresh perspective on the issues of the day. Allow the power of God’s presence to rise within you and set you free from fears. Worship Him.

It is God, whose power, presence, provision and protection make life good. *He* is the One who makes the difference between life and LIFE! David might complain to Him, as in [22:1-2](#), but read on! Note that he always follows his lamenting with a declaration that, although life seems rotten at the moment – God is good! That sort of worship would transform many Christians. Try it!

Keep reading Psalms and pause to soak on 42:1-2: *As the deer pants after streams of water, so I thirst for you, God. <sup>2</sup>I thirst for God, for the living God, when will I come and appear before God?* That – is worship. It is the heart which reaches toward God. It will find Him, and will be filled to overflowing with LIFE.

### **Worship in the Words of Jesus**

The Beatitudes describe the reward of a worshiper, as in Mt. 5:6: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* These “beautiful attitudes” and their fruit are only for those who have abandoned their self-centered fight for wholeness, and choose to walk in God’s ways instead.

Please note that it does not say, “Blessed are those who want to *do right*,” as in a right action. It is the hunger to *be righteous*, that is, rightly related to God and thus living in accordance with His plan for us. The *doing* follows the *being*. We get that all wrong and become satisfied with trying to *do right* while still under the overwhelming influence of our fallen nature and its soulish and bodily appetites. To hunger and thirst for righteousness, is to acknowledge our need for God and His way and to repent of (turn from) trying to do things our way. *That* is worship and it has great reward!

Consider also [Mark 8:34-38](#), and especially 34-35: *Then he called the crowd and his disciples together, and he said to them, "If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel, will save it.* Do we want to “save” our life, that is, to maintain the right to determine what is good for us, or will we die to our self-rule and live for Him? Jesus speaks clearly, and our response indicates the object of our worship.

### **Worship in the Writing of the Apostles**

God knows the struggles that we experience in our battle with the inclinations of the old nature, so He had the Apostles write about how we can enter fully into His provision for victorious and abundant living.

Implicit in our choice to seek LIFE in Him is the need to abandon pursuing it through satisfying the affections of the body and soul, and there is much teaching in the Word toward that end. [James 4:7-10](#) is a good example, including: *So submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Do Christians sometimes try to resist the devil without first submitting to God – and then wonder why he doesn't flee?! It is when we choose to worship God, that is, declare Him good and submit to Him, that we have power over Satan.

In [II Cor. 6:16 – 7:1](#), Paul is not writing about being “good” as much as about our need to decide who we will worship in our attempt to find life's fullness. He speaks of choices that are part of worship.

Summed up – choose God; flee evil; walk in the light of His presence; and we will be family with Him. *That* is LIFE. It is worship of God, and it is very different from the religion that so many know.

### **Worship in Hebrews, Peter, Revelation**

Would you agree that the heroes of faith in [Hebrews 11](#) were God worshipers? Didn't they determine to find their deepest satisfaction from their relationship with Him, and didn't that require a renunciation of things of the earth? And isn't that what enabled them to remain faithful through suffering and death? Is there any reason to think it is different for us today and in the coming darkness?

Peter's several rich discourses on suffering are addressed to those who have made God, *their* god. As they suffer they find their identity, purpose and comfort in Him. They are purified and equipped to serve others. They learn that suffering is a servant of joy, and that the best things in life come through the most difficult things in life. *That* is a spirit-led mindset. It is worship and it is transformational. Consider [I Peter 1:6-9](#); [2:19-23](#); [3:13-17](#); [4:1-2](#); [4:12-19](#) and [5:6-11](#).

Finally, as you read the book of Revelation, do so from the perspective of worship. That's what it's about, isn't it – the contest between God and Satan for the affection of men's hearts, and the final result of choices we make?

**Personal and Discussion Questions**

A. How do you respond to the first paragraph on Page 11? Mark one.

Strongly agree   Its close   It's waaaaay off!

B. On the discussion on Page 12 on Mt. 5:6, what difference do you see between wanting to *be righteous*, and just wanting to *do right* – or isn't it a big deal?

C. How realistic is this statement toward the top of Page 13? "Implicit in our choice to worship God and to seek LIFE in Him is the need to abandon pursuing it through satisfying the affections of the body and soul,"

## 5 – Drawing Near to God

*Therefore, brothers, we have confidence to enter into the most holy place by the blood of Jesus. <sup>20</sup> That is the new and living way that he has opened for us through the curtain, that is, by means of his flesh. <sup>21</sup> Because we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us approach with true hearts in the full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us also hold tightly to the confession of our hope without wavering, because God, who has promised, is faithful. Heb. 10:19-23*

This is one of the most astounding and exhilarating, but humbling and challenging texts in the whole Bible.

It is humanly inconceivable that God – the eternal God Who is perfect, complete and without flaw; Who is all powerful; Who designed the universe and spoke it into existence; Who formed the human body with complexity and intricacy that we will never understand; Who created man in His own image and gave him a perfect world to live in; and Who loved us enough that when we rejected Him in favor of Satan, came to earth Himself and suffered the consequences for our sins – would invite us to come into “the Most Holy Place” to worship Him! Yes, inconceivable.

We know that sin cannot enter that sacred place. We also know that we are never ever, even for a moment, holy enough in ourselves to qualify to come. We are invited to confidently enter “the Most Holy Place” with a heart that is naked and unashamed because the blood of Jesus has cleansed us from guilt. It should go without saying that we come humbly, and grateful for the privilege. We come, knowing the truth of [Titus 3:4-7](#).

Entering into God’s Presence to worship Him is not for super-saints. It’s for all who love Him including the poor, the least educated, or the most handicapped.

### **Praise and Thank Him!**

Praise Him, when you come into His presence. Declare that He is good. Faithful. Merciful. Powerful. He is all that you need and more. Tell Him you know that He loves you even as you are. That’s a good place to start and a safe place to run to if you’re starting to feel “down.”

Declare that you know He is changing you on the inside – forming you into the image of Christ, as Paul says in [II Cor. 3:18](#). It may be slow but it is happening! When you doubt that, declare Philip. 1:6: *I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in me will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.* (personalized)

As you declare who God is, and Who He is to you, you will be able to face the challenges of the day according to truth instead of fearful imagination. According to His power instead of your weakness. You will become like a child holding your father’s hand as you stand by the cage of a lion that is looking at you menacingly.

Yes, come humbly but confidently into His Presence on the basis of what Jesus has done for you. Worship Him – and see what happens. It will!

### **The Secret Place**

There is something special about meeting God in the secret place. The place where it's just you and Him. In Mt. 6:6 Jesus said: *But you, when you pray, enter your inner chamber. Shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. Then your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* Maybe your secret place is when you're alone in your car. Or somewhere in your home or workshop.

Any posture that suits you, suits Him. Speak quietly, shout, sing or be silent. Laugh. Cry. Eyes open or closed. Talk with God. (Talking *with* implies listening as well.) Yield yourself to Him and invite Him to commune with you.

You might read a Psalm and make it your own expression to Him. If you find yourself declaring your woes to God, as David did, follow up by affirming His goodness. Express your feelings but please don't accuse Him of failing you or of being inadequate. He *never* fails. He is *never* inadequate. The need *always* lies with us and He is more than ready and able to care for us! God made a perfect world and everything that is now broken, *is* so because of man's choices and actions under Satan's influence. It is arrogant and obnoxious for humankind to declare God unloving, inadequate or unable, and when we do that we distance ourselves from the Solution to our needs.

Meditate on God's love, strength and faithfulness and consider how they relate to your needs. Let Him tell you more about Himself – and yourself!

### **Confession Time**

It might be confession time. Confess specific sins. Tell Him the stuff about yourself that needs to be changed. The areas that need to be made new. The habits and attitudes that need to be replaced with those of Jesus. The struggle you have at the food buffet, or when you're at the computer and no one's watching.

I say confidently that failure to curb *any* physical or soulish appetite, and to bring it into submission to God, produces spiritual vulnerability and defeat in other areas. Secret sins lead to failure in other, visible ways, and they can be totally unrelated except that they both represent rebellion. We must judge ourselves instead of others in these matters and we must take them seriously. Even gossip handicaps many Christians.

### **Implore**

As you come before God, ask Him to show you the choices that you make to appease fleshly appetites of the body and soul. Ask Him to make godliness more appealing to you - to give you an appetite for what is truly satisfying. Ask Him to renew your mind - to wash out old thought patterns and replace them with new.

If you observe your life for a while you will see a repeated and predictable series of events (like a downward spiraling stairwell) that leads to anger,

depression, moral failure or other evidence of missing LIFE. Ask God to show you the entry point to that stairwell – the trigger event that moves you toward it! Believe me, He can and will do that if you truly want Him to!

The trigger event might be something that is outright sinful. It can also be something that is not sin in itself but which consumes inappropriate time, attention, money or other resources. Dealing with it can require our surrendering something to Him, and *that* represents an active choice. James 4:7-8 says: *So submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come close to God, and he will come close to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* Look at the sequence of events there! God is ready to do His part!!

### **Hindrances**

If you are from a religious background that has strong traditions, symbols or cultural expressions, ask God to reveal if they hinder your pursuit of intimacy with Him. They can help you, but they also have potential to impart a sense of spiritual security that becomes a substitute for faith in God. You can't depend on both. Come to Him in spirit and truth, holding nothing back. *That* is worship!

God can show you hindrances which you inherited from your family, church, community or national cultures. They might be systems of thought, dabbling in powers of darkness, or more. Even if you are totally innocent of having taken initiative yourself they can influence and handicap you. He can uncover them!

### **Three Levels Deep**

Psalms 139:23-24 is powerful: *Examine me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. <sup>24</sup> See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.* This speaks of three levels of “knowing.” Our heart is the deepest level and only God knows what is there. We don't fully know our own heart!

Then, our anxious thoughts are known to both God and us, but not to others. Finally, our ways are known to Him, to us, and to others.

Inviting God to come and search us at all three levels is an important part of what it means to worship in spirit and truth.

### **Holding on To Hope**

I propose that to “hold tightly to the confession of our hope without wavering” in v23 at the beginning of this chapter, means that we will not veer from seeking LIFE from God in spirit-to-Spirit worship – in spite of the voices that come through the soul and the body as we face life's tests, temptations and trials.

It is no coincidence that vv 24-25 follow: *Let us consider how to motivate one another to love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup> Let us not stop meeting together, as some have done. Instead, encourage one another more and more, and all the more as you see the day coming closer.* The fellowship of the body of believers is an important part of our advancing in our worship of God. There are many ways for it to happen, but it is increasingly important that Christians are in intentional, meaningful relationship with each other as the days grow darker.



## 6 - The Gathered Body

### Like a River

The worship of God requires spirit-to-Spirit interaction between us and Him.

However, we often use the word “worship” in a general way to refer to our Sunday morning or other public gatherings, or to a specific part of the assembly such as when we sing or receive the offering.

We might assume it is authentic worship if we spend an hour a day in quiet time. Or if we tithe or give ourselves in service to others. There are many things that Christians do that we think of as acts of worship.

We need to understand the relationship between forms, and worship itself. Consider that it takes both water and a channel, to make a river. Picture what you have when you have both and if either is missing.

Any form is only a potential channel unless the Spirit of God and the spirit of man interact through it. All traditions and forms have potential to be devoid of water, and worse yet, the ability to deceive us into thinking that they themselves *are* the water of worship!

On the flip side, a life that is focused on God, and on His purposes for us, is significantly a life of worship. As we increasingly find ourselves in Him, worship becomes a way of life and doesn't always have to be a conscious act.

### Worship in Song

I believe that God deliberately designed music as something that reaches to the core of man. It has power in us – a tool of God in His ministry to us and one that we use in response to Him.

The gathered body is comprised of people who have many other things on our minds. We bring today's game and next week's agenda into the assembly, along with our fears, doubts, needs, wants, pains, depression, jealousy, anger and all else that makes us who we are at the moment. We need help, and this is one place we ought to be able to find it. The assembly is a time when worship leaders can help us connect with God and receive LIFE from Him.

However, they are only there to help us. Worship in song is not like an observer sport. It is a participatory event. We must do our part in focusing on God; making the words of the songs our own; allowing music to soften us and help us open up to God; and then responding as He invites. Our singing can be only noise, but it can also be rich interaction with God regardless of the expertise of our leader and others. It can be LIFE-giving interface with the living God, and that rests significantly with those in the pew.

There are celebrative and “church family” songs in which we declare who we are as God's people individually and collectively. And there are the focused praise and worship songs, meaning those which are addressed more intimately to God. Especially the latter are holy moments, and as much as possible our worship leading and our environment ought to demonstrate respect for that. Hindrances and distractions must be kept to a minimum. We are deliberately drawing near to

GOD. Creator God. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The God of Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. The Author and Giver of LIFE and the One who is Himself – LIFE!

### **Worship Leaders**

Worship leading, as in leading the body in lifting our voices to God, is a spiritual service. Its sole purpose is to foster an environment which invites God's presence and stimulates us to commune with Him.

Our leaders must judge everything they do instrumentally, and in music, words, voices, graphics, audio-visual and more, by that criteria. They are there to serve, not to entertain or impress. They are alongside us, to help us as we worship God, but they are not what this is about.

The less conspicuous they desire to be, the more effective they are. Each ought to be as willing to be unseen, as to be seen. God will use who they are inwardly more than who they appear to be outwardly. Worship is very spirit in nature, and since both God and Satan are spirit, the influence of either can be present.

One of the most effective ways to *lead* worship, is to worship – and not for the video camera. And it is certainly true that those who have a rich, private worship experience will be more effective in publicly leading others.

Further, a worship leader whose life is out of order will be a detriment to the richness of collective worship. There can be form because of gifts and personality, but authentic spiritual worship will be diminished.

The quality of what worship leaders do is important too. Well-timed words on the screen, and a technical team that flows together, do a lot to create an environment that minimizes distractions and stimulates our connecting with God.

Choosing songs under God's guidance is a biggie. Sometimes He would lead us into an exuberant service and other times a more somber one.

### **The Preachers**

And finally – our preachers and teachers contribute immensely to the vitality of our worship. If their message draws us into the wonder of God's persistent love for and acceptance of us; and of His power, sovereignty, knowledge and limitless resources; and of the LIFE that He offers us - we will hardly be able to wait to express that in song. That message is potentially explosive within us and will stimulate us to action and expression without coaching or prescribed form, and it will carry over into our private worship experiences as well.

Conversely, preaching that focuses on ones' distinctive doctrines; on various earthly and fleshly applications of the spiritual truths of the Kingdom of God; and/or on the knowledge and eloquence of the preacher, actually empties the message of its power ([I Cor. 1:17](#)) and dampens worship. We then default to forms and traditions and to simply "singing" instead of worshipping.

Preaching for the heart, even if it is "a strong word" that calls us to repentance, connects us to the LIFE and power of the Gospel and is much more likely to draw the response of worship than preaching for the "head" is.

### **Gifts for Worship**

Our senses of seeing and hearing, and our ability to feel emotion, are gifts that can help us in focused individual or collective worship. They are channels through which the water of communion with God can flow.

Our emotions can serve us in responding to God. He can use them to soften our hearts so we will surrender to Him. However, many Christians fail to move beyond having their senses stimulated. They think the good feeling is the river itself. They fail to deliberately advance into expressing worship by making their own declarations to God of His greatness and who He is to them. They stop short of personally and humbly offering themselves to Him, which is the point where the worship experience can bring change in the individual's spiritual journey. It is *there*, that LIFE can flow into us and make us more whole, because *that* is worship.

We also need to understand that worship can occur in a field or a cave with no resources other than a heart or hearts drawn to God. And that there are many rich and meaningful ways to express private worship, including doing it silently in our office cubicle in a moment of need or of overflowing joy. Our deaf, dumb and/or blind friends can worship Him as well as hearing, speaking and seeing folks.

### **Personal and Discussion Questions**

A. Do you agree that sometimes we think that the channel itself is the river, that is, we are satisfied with forms which may or may not include actual worship?

B. How much help does the average Christian in the gathered body need, to enter into actual communion with God?

We need lots of help      We need a little help      No help needed!

C. How do you respond to this statement on Page 19? "Worship is not like an observer sport. It is a participatory event. We must do our part in focusing on God; making the words of the songs our own; allowing music to soften us and help us open up to God; and then responding as He invites."

D. Is there anything in this chapter that you would take issue with?

## 7 - The Ugly Reality

### "Please Say It's Not True!"

In his excellent book *THE CHALLENGE OF THE DISCIPLINED LIFE*, Richard Foster proposes that money and possessions can have the power of a god. I wrestled with that late into the night one time in Kenya in 1992, as I was preparing to teach. It just didn't seem right to me. I wanted to see them as purely neutral without a residing power of some kind.

When I got up the next morning I was still uneasy about the whole thing and in a short time I would be facing my class. I agonized, not wanting to either deny or acknowledge what I suspected was true.

Elaine and I were staying in a hotel. As we sat at breakfast God moved me to identify the characteristics of a god, and to list how we respond to a god. These thoughts came to mind and I wrote them on a napkin.

#### **A god offers:**

- Security
- Power
- Provision
- Protection
- A sense of well-being
- Identity, personal significance
- Peace
- Purpose in life

#### **The human response**

- Willingness to sacrifice
- It draws our affection
- Worship
- A passionate devotion
- It directs life's decisions/choices
- A master/servant relationship

God then moved me to look at the list and decide if money and possessions can offer these rewards and draw the same responses. I was humbled to say it was true! This describes one's relationship with any god. We give ourselves to whatever we believe will make life good – sometimes even for a moment.

### **Here's the Problem**

As Jesus said in John 4:24, God is spirit. Man was created with body, soul (mind, will and emotions), and spirit.

In the Garden, the will of God was communicated to man through *his* spirit, and it was this input that governed man's life. God – was man's god, and thus the source of LIFE to him. Man worshiped God and was complete in every way. Incredible!!

Then came the fall and it was quite a tumble! In typical fashion Satan only told Adam and Eve part of the truth when he said that they could be like God and know good and evil. It felt empowering – something like a promotion – to be more like God; to be able to know good and evil; and to decide for themselves what they wanted instead of only doing good. What power! The truth, was that they would pay a horrific price for having that knowledge!

Deciding to choose for themselves by eating the forbidden fruit was a direct act of rebellion against God. It instituted a new approach to man trying to find wholeness and fulfillment, and the consequences were devastating.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God's rule they were driven out of the Garden and separated from the Spirit-to-spirit fellowship they had known. Their spirit, which had been the gateway for the flow of LIFE into them, and which had then governed their soul and body, was now closed off from Him. They were now governed by the self-centered cravings of their soul and body under Satan's influence and power. Little did they know that his question to Eve was part of his plan to show God that *he* could rule man. That *he* could become their god. His lie that they could live independently of God's rule, set them up to worship *him* instead.

Man fell all the way from the incomparable glory of living in God's presence with all the benefits of His power and provision, and finding every human need met in Him - to the place where they would kill, lie, steal and gossip in order to try to feel like complete human beings.

In simple terms, man took on the rebellious and self-centered nature of Satan himself when they rejected God as their god. They thought they were becoming their own god, believing that they would rule themselves, and this misnomer still misleads many including some who consider themselves "Christian." It is also the basis of much of modern psychology and is foundational to secular thought.

### **Personal and Discussion Questions**

- A. Do you think that the two columns on Page 22 under "A god offers" and "The human response" are accurate? Would you add to the lists or take anything from them?
- B. Which word or words best describe your response to the last paragraph? Circle one or more:
- An insult to humanity    Overly morbid    Reactionary    "Right on"
- C. What would you change if you were writing this chapter?

## 8 – Born Again

*Jesus replied to him, "Truly, truly, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:3-8*

### **In the Beginning**

When we are born of the flesh we come into this world by the act of a man and a woman and we are physically alive. Being born again, or “born of the Spirit,” is an act of God in response to our decision to believe in Him and to receive His gift of eternal LIFE - and we become *spiritually* alive.

As discussed earlier, LIFE speaks of human wholeness through our spirit to Spirit relationship with God. By God’s design, man’s spirit is the gateway for input from His Spirit and is to rule our soul (mind, will and emotions) and body.

In the Garden, man was godly by nature. Loving God, and relating intimately to Him and living according to His will, were natural to him. His needs were met through this relationship and the natural result was LIFE to the hilt.

That all changed drastically when man sinned. He still had human existence but the spiritual LIFE he had known was gone. It happened as God had said in Genesis 2:17: *But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, for on the day that you eat from it, you will surely die.*

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God they were separated from Him and from the spiritual interaction through which LIFE had flowed into them. Satan became “the ruler of this world,” as Jesus put it ([John12:31](#)). He was now their god (p2), their spiritual source, and His gateway is through our soul and body. Man now had a depraved nature and was condemned to try to find wholeness in the things of the world - a never-ending effort in futility.

Further, they became mortal beings, meaning they would die physically.

The spirit of man was not extinguished when Adam and Eve sinned, but it was cut off from its source and could no longer receive LIFE from the Spirit of God. Even after man fell from their high place of intimate fellowship with God and came under Satan’s rule, their spirit longed to be united with God and to be fully human according to creation design.

We are reunited with Him when we are born again and our human spirit is supernaturally made alive by His touch. We again have spirit to Spirit fellowship and His LIFE flows into us.

Few Christians understand the magnitude of what God has provided for us through the work of our Lord Jesus! “Eternal life” doesn’t only mean that we will exist forever, it means that we will have LIFE forever, beginning when we are born again and never ending! It is the Abundant LIFE that Jesus spoke of. God has adopted us into His family but we often act more like foster children.

We receive a new nature, with a new set of natural inclinations as the result of our transfer of citizenship and identity from one kingdom to another. ([Col. 1:13-14](#), [Acts 26:18](#))

The Church in America has done poorly at communicating what actually happens in an authentic “born again” experience. It is a transaction between God and man and includes both confession and repentance. Let’s look at that further.

### **Confession and Repentance**

To “confess” is to agree with an accusation. The first part of Biblical confession is to agree with God that we have sinned, but we must also agree that we are a sinner by nature and living in rebellion against Him. We ask God to forgive our sins and we receive His gift of salvation, which is available because Jesus took the penalty for them upon Himself on the cross. ([I Peter 2:24](#), [I John 1:9](#), [John 3:16](#), [Rom. 10:9](#), [Rev. 3:20](#))

*Repentance* means “to turn away from.” We are to turn from both sinful actions and our rebellious heart. In order to do that we must surrender to God’s rule, which means that we renounce our right to decide for ourselves what is good, and simply obey Him as in the Garden before sin! That decision reverses Adam and Eve’s decision and releases us from the death-grip of the sinful nature that we inherited from Adam. ([John 8:36](#), [Rom. 8:1-3](#), [I John 4:4](#), [Col. 2:9-15](#))

It is in this confession/repentance/surrender event that we are born again. Our spirit is made alive and is again able to commune with God; receive input from Him; and give godly oversight to our soul and body. We are truly a new person in our innermost being. We have a new object of worship and a new spiritual nature which is inclined toward God, and it affects every aspect of life.

Yes, there are now many battles to be fought between the flesh and the Spirit as we pursue Christ. We are a spiritual infant and there is now the process of growing into adulthood. We must learn and practice new attitudes and disciplines and apply them to our life, but as we mature our spirit dominates more and more and increasingly rules over the desires of our soul and body.

### **The Way of the Cross**

When we invite people to come to Jesus we must be clear about the far-reaching implications of what actually occurs in the born-again event. A deep, life-changing switch in identity, affection, loyalty, allegiance, life-purpose, world view and lifestyle takes place in those who truly follow Jesus.

In Luke 9:23-24 Jesus said: *If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.* <sup>24</sup> *Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.* Also [Mk 8:34-38](#)

Born again folks will live with the mindset that we take up our cross and die daily to self-rule and to the fleshly instincts and habits of the body and soul. We

love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, seeking LIFE in Him rather than in the things of the world. This truth is as LIFE-giving as it is unpopular.

When we are born again we care more about God and His purposes, than about ourselves and our selfish ambitions. We join Paul in saying: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Gal. 2:20

### **Hard Questions**

Does the typical evangelistic message in America include the call to deep, life-changing repentance of our rebellion against God? Does it tell us that when we are born again we have a new god? That we are not our own – we have been bought with a price? Does it communicate the expectation that every aspect of life will be influenced and shaped by this commitment? Or, does it simply call us to confess our sins and “get saved” so we don’t go to hell when we die?

Does the American Christian community call us to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus - to not only try to avoid evil but to pursue righteousness; and to crave the life that is actively centered on God and increasingly coming under His rule; and to find our deepest satisfaction in pleasing Him; and to humbly serve others; and to forgive as He forgave; and to be content in His plans for us in terms of work, position and “stuff;” and to do our part in fulfilling the Great Commission? Or, are we often satisfied to avoid the “thou shalt nots” of our church and community and to measure our godliness in that way?

Is it possible that many Christians have never deliberately surrendered their will to God? And that our failure to take this step is why many who confess Christ are still controlled by the desires of the body and soul?

Would you agree that for many today, following Christ in this way would require redefining the word “Christian” from meaning one who has accepted Jesus as their “Savior” so they go to heaven instead of hell – to one who has surrendered his/her will to God and made Him Lord and Master of all of life?

### **What a Deal!**

“Born again” goes deep. It delivers us from Satan’s dark kingdom and transfers us into the Kingdom of God and LIFE there.

- We now glorify God by choosing Him over Satan.
- We live a full and satisfied life on earth.
- We are a testimony and encouragement to others, both those who know Him and those who don’t.
- We go to heaven instead of hell when we die.
- We get to be in the presence of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and worship Him forever!

Only God will decide who goes to heaven in the end, but at the very least the Church’s timidity about calling us to actually being born again cheats many out of LIFE now and hinders them from living in a way that would draw others to Him.



## 9 – To Love is to Give

The ability to give and receive love is a defining mark of both God and man. It is one of the ways that we are like Him. To love is to give, as in [John 3:16](#) and [Eph. 5:25](#). We will give ourselves to whatever or whomever we love.

The fall of man resulted in our being condemned to express love through the corrupted desires of our body and soul instead of the affections of a pure spirit that was in communion with God. That could not be satisfying like pure water and would create even more thirst like drinking saltwater does.

The object of a Christian's love is so significant. If we love God with every part of us, nothing is reserved for something that competes with Him. What an affront it is, that we would take this most precious God-like and God-given ability, and turn it toward anything but Him!

### Fatal Attraction

Money, and the possessions, worldly pleasures and power it offers, are the most common surrogate-gods. They are the most frequent source of personal significance and, in both the world and many churches, are a primary criterion in assigning importance and value to people. There's a reason that Paul was inspired to write [I Tim. 6:10](#), saying that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil!

Prosperity and ease feed the fleshly cravings of the soul and the body of the natural man and can easily lead us away from worshipping God as our source of LIFE. He issued a warning way back in [Deut. 8](#). Read it all and reread vv [11-14](#).

Both Testaments repeatedly warn about the risks of wealth. It invites Satan's temptation to pride and offers us power to consider ourselves superior and privileged. In a frightening way, it can convince us that we don't need God.

Study [Matthew 6:19-34](#) and ask God to interpret it and apply it to you. Don't let the fact that it is largely rationalized away by the church, dissuade you from believing that Jesus meant it. Dare to believe that the absolutes He lays down are exactly that.

One of the most authentic marks of true followers of Jesus is the refusal to love money and possessions and allow them to define them. They are content, as they humbly become stewards of whatever God has entrusted to them, and use it under His oversight. They are marked by quiet generosity and are satisfied to live modestly. They know that generosity is not measured as much by what they give as by what they keep for themselves. They can be friends to both the rich and the poor.

A test of the place that wealth has in one's heart is the measure to which it is their source of joy and contributes to their sense of wellbeing. What would happen to their joy (and their Christian testimony) if they lost it all? Do they

hold it tightly or loosely, and are they willing to give it all away if God asks them to?

Be assured that I'm not preaching poverty here. I fully understand the need for resources in the extension of God's kingdom and honor those who are faithful with much. I'm addressing the materialism that so easily and so often captures Christians and draws our eyes and hearts away from God.

It can hardly be said more straightforwardly than in [I John 2:15-17](#) where we are warned against loving the world and the things of the world. Man's love for God can be replaced by his love for the world – and they are mutually exclusive. [James 4:4](#) is brutally candid on that too.

There's hope though. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He said: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* (Mt . 22:37) Loving God is part of His creation design, and in our redemption He restores that ability to us!

### **Christian Love**

When we are born again we are enabled to experience and express love that is shaped by the nature of God. And we can give to others because our own soul hunger is satisfied through relationship with Him.

Conflict is nearly always the result of unfulfilled expectations, which are often tied to our need for others to satisfy our selfish soul hunger. That is, we expect someone else to give to us, so that we feel good about ourselves. Think about conflicts in your own life and the degree to which they are the result of unfulfilled, selfish expectations!

We are immune to such conflict in the measure to which our heart is filled by God and He becomes the answer to our inner hunger. We don't need to have our way. Or to be coddled. Or honored. Or to have nice things said about us. Instead, we can be one through whom [John 7:38](#) rivers of living water flow to those in need around us.

An increasing freedom to give, is an elementary mark of our becoming more like Jesus. It is proof that we have received a new nature. The law of our need to *get* from others has been superseded by a greater law.

In [John 13:34-35](#), Jesus commands us to love one another as He has loved us, and says that will convince the world that we are His disciples. We are now able to speak words that build others up instead of those which tear down, as Paul instructs in [Eph. 4:29](#). Why do we speak unwholesome words if not to try to build ourselves up – usually at the expense of another?

It is love, which enables us to extend mercy to another or to forbear their peculiarities or idiosyncrasies. Read [I Cor. 13](#) and consider how its acts of love represent giving to another.

To love is to give! And give and give! We can do that as we worship God and His Presence flows into our spirit and our soul, setting us free from selfishness and enabling us to love.

**Personal and Discussion Questions**

- A. How serious do you think American Christians take I John 2:15-17? (p29)
- Very seriously    Somewhat seriously    Not seriously at all
- B. Are love for God, and the love for the world which is spoken of here, mutually exclusive? Explain.
- C. Does Matthew 6:19-34 (p28) apply to the church in America today, or is it outdated by the pressures and needs of our society and the opportunities that God has given us?
- D. What do you think of the statement on Page 29, “Conflict is nearly always the result of unfulfilled expectations, which are often tied to our need for others to satisfy our selfish soul hunger.”?

## 10 – The Proof is in the Pudding

Having God increasingly become the focus of our worship, and thus our source of LIFE, involves a process. It begins with the life-changing event of being born again, followed by the process of countless spiritual encounters and choices through which we become more like Jesus.

We can tell a lot about where we're at on the journey by stepping back and taking an honest look at ourselves. We can learn by listening to our conversations. What is most important to us is often revealed by what we talk about. And we can gain insight by reviewing our relationships and conflicts.

We can look at our emotions too. In some measure they reveal whether we are being influenced by God, through our spirit, or by Satan through our soul. Are we joyful or sad – and why?

Worship can have a lot to do with depression and with emotional well-being in general. It would be difficult to worship God as David did, and stay depressed! Read [Psalm 34](#) the next time you're "down," and worship with him.

Declare to God – and to yourself, and the devil, the angels, and anyone else who is listening – that He and His ways are good. Verbally surrender to Him. Declare your confidence in Him regardless of the circumstances or your feelings. Proclaim the victory but allow God to define what that means. Trust Him for justice; for vindication; and for His presence in the unknown. Let go of your rights, expectations and control. Nothing more accurately defines "worship!"

### **Contentment Is - -**

Contentment is both an act of, and the result of worship. It means being satisfied with the place God has for us. We are content with whatever He decides we should have regardless of how we compare to others.

Certainly we are diligent and industrious (laziness is an affront to God), but constantly wanting "more" so we can feel good about ourselves leads to all kinds of sin, as Paul says in [I Tim. 6:10](#). Even *he* had to *learn* to be content, as he says in [Philip. 4:11](#). In [I Tim 6:6](#) he tells us that godliness with contentment is great gain – and certainly he is speaking of spiritual gain!

So, what do we most want when we get up in the morning? And what *is* it that determines if it has been a good day or a bad day when we lay down at night? What can cause us to say "It is well with my soul," and what has power to throw us into a tailspin? We can tell a lot about the object of our worship by looking at the fruit in our lives. Worship of God produces righteousness, peace and joy – in us and in those who see God in us and are thus drawn to Him.

When we live a life of God-worship, nothing else has power to define us – to tell us who we are. Neither success nor failure; riches or poverty; happiness or sadness; health or sickness; acceptance or rejection by others – or anything else! All are body and soul based and we are now spirit based!

### **Spiritual Maturity**

God worshipers are able to view life from His perspective and experience it by His power. As we mature we are less often handicapped by the human selfishness and weakness which had previously controlled us. Nothing defines us individually as much as what we pursue in an attempt to make life good for ourselves. Our choices have predestined results, for now – and for forever.

As we grow in Christlikeness through God worship, our basic sense of who we are will shift from earthly influences and identities including the family we grew up in; abuses we suffered; personal failures and all else that connects us to the brokenness of this earth. We will live with the sense of being a child of the King and thus linked to all the resources of heaven to help us experience the Spirit-filled life.

As we advance in our spiritual walk we will see profound changes in our attitudes, affections, habits and thought patterns. We will be changed from the inside out, becoming a totally different person in many ways. The self-control which comes through surrender to God will reshape many of our bodies. Our homes will become places of peace and safety for children, fewer of whom will be diagnosed with A.D.D.. Our need for blood pressure pills and other prescriptions will decrease.

It is in worshiping God that we are instructed, cleansed and empowered in a way that brings the Fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)) into our lives to replace the works of the flesh. ([Gal. 5:19-21](#).)

As this happens we will see something like Isaiah 60:1-3: *Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has risen on you. <sup>2</sup> Though darkness will cover the earth, and thick darkness the nations; yet Yahweh will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen on you. <sup>3</sup> Nations will come to your light, and kings to your bright light that is rising.* We will need far fewer evangelism training classes because people will be drawn to His obvious Presence in us. Note that they are drawn to the Light, not to us.

### **A Worship Lifestyle**

The authenticity of our worship is evidenced in every area of life. It is not just something we do at certain times such as in church. It profoundly influences how we go about our work, family, recreation, and relationships in every setting. It dictates how we use every resource that God entrusts to us.

Money, sex, food and power enrich us when they function under the governance of our spirit. Think though, of how much hurt and brokenness they cause when they are body and soul-directed under Satan's influence. The Christian who worships God in spirit and truth will be marked by how he or she handles these very practical aspects of life.

Christian "faith" is often more focused on trusting God for things related to earthly health, wealth, comfort and pleasure, than on what would more accurately represent LIFE. In the latter context, faith is practiced to help us trust God enough to surrender to Him so that we can enter more deeply into LIFE. Do we have as much faith in God to accept His will and His plan for us, as we would like to have to get what we want in earthly things? This helps confirm who or what is the object of our deepest worship.

### **Help in Troubled Times**

It is worship of God that will guide us through the coming political and economic storms. Such worship will purify our hearts; keep us from deception; empower us to live victoriously; equip us to bring others to Jesus; and enable us to suffer for His Name.

We will know that everything is a servant to God's purposes – even the most corrupt of business or financial institutions or the most perverse of political leaders. Nobody and nothing overpowers Him. Only He will have the last word. We do not need to be disturbed. We can stand on the Rock of Truth that everything works for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes, as Paul writes in [Romans 8:28](#). *That*, is worship.

Only the genuine, life-changing worship of God can enable us to live in a way that confirms ones' anticipation of the return of our Lord Jesus. And only that, can equip us to view personal and world events through His eyes and to see His purposes in all that is unfolding around us.

### **Peace in the Church**

The Kingdom of God transcends national, denominational and other lines that we draw so quickly. We are literally and actively to be "brother" and "sister" to all who are in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That is, all who embrace the several doctrines which Christians have held to through the centuries.

We will bless each other and refuse to separate over denominational distinctives. We will welcome others as part of the wholeness of God's witness in our community and will learn from them.

The application of that little truth alone would radically change the church and her testimony! It is only possible when we are Spirit-led, which will only happen if God is truly the object of our worship.

When that happens, it will be the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in John 17:21; *so that they will all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you. I pray that they will also be in us so that the world will believe that you have sent me.* And *that* will be the proof of the pudding that the world is waiting for, to convince them that God is good and worthy of their worship.

### **Personal and Discussion Questions**

- A. How able are you to step back and observe yourself and take an honest look at how you're advancing in your walk with God?
  - a. Very able, I do it regularly
  - b. I do it sometimes but not often
  - c. I never thought of that
  - d. I fear to do it
  
- B. Why might Christians fear to honestly look at how they are advancing in their walk with God?

## Conclusion

### **I conclude that - -**

Worship of God is the act of bowing ones' heart before Him, to receive LIFE. Authentic Christianity can only flow out of a born-again experience which includes both confession and repentance, but it seems that American Christians will do nearly anything but repent, in our attempt to have more of God.

Truth be said though, we cannot enter into the fullness that He has for us until we give up trying to do it our way. As I've have heard Gloria Gaither say, we only find freedom when we surrender.

We need to get honest about the degree to which we present a low-cost version of the Christian life. *Do* we accurately define what it means to be born again and to surrender to Christ as "Master?" *Are* we honest about both the cost and the reward of living under His Lordship? I think not.

The flock is cheated out of LIFE when we present "getting saved" as fire insurance for when we die – even if some do upgrade that by claiming a free pass to earthly comfort and abundance while here.

Further, we are misrepresenting God to those who so desperately need Him. He intends for us to be a testimony to the joy of doing it His way. Examples of peace in the storm. Proof of the liberty that comes from the sense of "eternity in our hearts" as we vest ourselves in that which is "forever," instead of wasting our years on things that will go poof in a moment.

Finally, we rob God of the glory He deserves. We were created to worship Him, and when we chose to live a life of worship it reveals His glory, that is, His supremacy over Satan, to those who still need to know Him. How well are we doing that?

It is the worship of God in Spirit and in truth that gives entrance to the indescribable spiritual richness and fruitful service which God offers us through Jesus Christ His Son. Yet, that practice is rarely preached with insight and is barely understood in the Christian church in America. We prefer to focus on our distinctive doctrines and on various earthly and fleshly applications of the spiritual truths of the Kingdom of God. Such life would be much more common if "the word of the cross" ([I Cor. 1:18-30](#), [Lk. 9:23-26](#)) wasn't part of the journey that leads to it – but it is.

Nothing matters except that we worship God - - and that affects everything. *Every* thing. May the true worshipers arise!

# The Prostitute Bride

Ken Stoltzfus, Winter of 1978-79  
 Minor grammatical revisions Oct. 5, 1987

An uncomfortable allegory, long, but best read in one sitting

## I - A Beautiful Young Lady

A beautiful young lady  
 who seemed to be perfect in every way  
 was captured by a vicious and wicked man  
 who took her away into captivity.

A strong young man knew of her beauty and  
 worth  
 and determined to rescue her

After much careful planning  
 and at considerable risk  
 he rescued the young lady  
 and brought her to freedom

Her heart was filled with gratitude and love  
 and she accepted his proposal for marriage

He said, "I want to prepare a perfect place for  
 us to spend the rest of our lives together

"I will go away for a while  
 and get our place ready  
 then I will come back again  
 and we will be united for life

"Until I come  
 you may stay with my family  
 where you will have everything you need

"You will have food  
 and clothing  
 and shelter

"You will be protected from the cold and storm  
 and from evil men who would be attracted to  
 your beauty  
 and misuse you

"I ask only that you keep yourself pure for me  
 and set your heart on the things that would  
 make us both happy"

The young lady promised to keep herself for  
 him  
 until he came back

She eagerly awaited his return  
 But  
 as the days turned into weeks  
 and the weeks into months  
 she began to lose her first-love

She would leave the safety of his family's home  
 and wander the streets of the city  
 making friends with the people there

She became aware of the desires of her body  
 and began to give herself to men  
 who were interested only in a fleeting  
 moments pleasure

At first she was conscience-stricken  
 and felt remorse for what she was doing  
 but she looked around her  
 and saw that "everyone else" was doing it too

And so  
 as time went on  
 and the groom tarried his coming  
 she became more and more at ease in her  
 waywardness

She even began to take money from men  
 who were eager to indulge themselves in her  
 beauty

She told herself, "I need this  
 to buy the necessities of life"

But she could never quite forget the young  
 man's words  
 "If you stay with my family  
 you will have everything you need"

One day the young man returned  
 with anticipation in his heart

He had completed the mansion for her  
 It was perfect in every way  
 and would fill her life with joy forever  
 He came to her with outstretched arms  
 expecting that she had kept herself for this day  
 But the moment he saw her  
 he knew that something was wrong

She didn't have the glimmer in her eyes  
 that would show her joy in his coming

She tried to greet him warmly  
but he knew that he had interrupted her life  
and interfered with things that were more  
important to her

He said, "I have come to take you home  
to the mansion I have prepared for you  
where we would live together forever

"But"  
he said  
"I see that you have not kept yourself for me  
and you don't really delight in my coming

"My perfect and pure bride  
has made herself a prostitute  
to the wicked men of the city

"Therefore  
you must leave the home of my family  
and spend the rest of your life in the streets of  
the city  
where your kind of wickedness abounds  
where there is cold  
and storm  
and hunger  
where men will use you for their pleasure  
with no respect for your real beauty and worth

"And I will find another bride  
who delights in my love  
enough to keep herself pure for me"

## II In the Beginning

In the beginning  
God created the heavens and the earth

As a very special part of His creation  
He made man and woman  
even in His own image

One day Satan came  
and through deceit  
led man and woman into captivity

God was watching from heaven  
and immediately announced that He would  
rescue them  
even if it meant death for His own Son

After several thousand years of careful planning  
and at the expense of the life of His only Son  
God rescued man and woman  
and led them to freedom

Their hearts were filled with gratitude and love  
and they accepted His request that they  
become members of His family

The Son said, "I am going away for a while  
to prepare a mansion for you  
and I will come again  
and will take you to Myself  
that where I am  
there you might be also

"Until I come  
I will send another Counselor to be with you  
and He will lead you into everything good

"I will see that you have everything you need  
while you are awaiting My return

"You will have food  
and clothing  
and shelter  
and will lack no good thing

"If there is anything you need  
ask  
in My Name  
and I will see that you have it  
that your joy might be full

"I ask only that you seek the things I seek  
and keep yourself pure for Me"

The man and woman's hearts were  
overwhelmed  
and they promised to keep themselves for Him  
until He returned

But  
as the days turned into weeks  
and the weeks into months  
they began to lose their first-love

They began to leave the safety of that place  
where their minds were fastened on the One  
who had rescued them

No longer anticipating His imminent return  
they began to wander the streets of the world  
and to make friends with the people there

They became aware of the desires within  
themselves  
the desire for riches  
fame  
prestige  
security  
and power

More and more they gave themselves to these  
desires  
knowing full well that they gave satisfaction  
only for a little while

At first they were conscience-stricken  
and felt remorse for what they were doing  
because they knew it was displeasing to the  
One who had rescued them  
and Who was coming back for them soon

But  
as they looked around them  
they saw that "everyone else" was doing these  
things too

And so  
as time went on  
and the One who had bought their freedom  
tarried His coming  
they began to feel more and more at ease in  
these things

They even sought money above everything else  
saying to themselves "We need it to buy the  
necessities of life"

But they could not quite forget the words of the  
One who had rescued them

He had said to them  
"Seek first the things of My Kingdom  
and My righteousness  
and all of the necessities of life will be given to  
you"

One day their Savior returned  
with anticipation in His heart

He had completed the mansion for them

It would be perfect in every way  
and would fill their lives with joy forever

He came to them with outstretched arms  
but the moment He saw them  
He knew something was very wrong

They didn't have the glimmer in their eyes  
that would show their joy in His coming

They tried to greet Him warmly  
but He knew He had interrupted their lives  
and interfered with things that were more  
important to them

He said  
"I have come to take you home to the mansion  
I have prepared for you  
where we would live together forever  
"But"  
He said  
"I see you have not kept yourselves for Me

"You have not trusted in My provision for you  
and you don't delight in My coming

"You  
for whom I died  
to set you free from the one who deceived you  
and led you into captivity  
have again been deceived  
and been led astray from your first-love for Me

"My perfect and pure possession  
for whom I died  
have sold themselves into the wickedness  
around them  
for a fleeting moments pleasure

Even though you pretend to greet me warmly  
you may not enter into My kingdom  
which is reserved for those who have done  
what I asked

"Therefore  
depart from Me  
ye cursed  
into everlasting fire  
which was prepared for the devil and his  
angels  
those who held you captive before I set you  
free

"I will find the truly righteous  
those who have done My will  
and don't just call Me 'Lord'  
and together  
we will enter into My mansion forever"

### III If it is Really True

If it is really true  
that man is a special part of God's creation  
that part alone which is privileged to have  
fellowship with Him

And  
if it is really true that  
when man decided to reject this love  
and scorn this fellowship  
God did not reject him  
but loved him enough to work through several  
thousand years of history  
to work out a plan for his redemption  
by sending His only Son to literally bear the  
punishment for all man's sins

And  
if it is true that Jesus left this earth  
for the express purpose of preparing a place  
for us to spend forever with Him

If it is true  
that heaven is a reality  
and Jesus is there today  
preparing an eternal home for us

And  
if it is really so that  
before He left  
He promised to send a Counselor from  
heaven to live inside us  
and that Counselor came at Pentecost

And  
if He has truly called us to be separate from  
the world  
and to be conformed to Himself  
being changed into His likeness  
more and more

If He asked us to deny the old fleshly desires  
within us  
and willingly bear our cross daily  
cheerfully suffering abuse for Him  
and the loss of things that bring pleasure for  
only a fleeting moment

If He really meant what He said when He told  
us  
"As the Father sent Me  
so send I you"

And  
"Not everyone who says to Me  
'Lord, Lord'  
shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven  
but only he who does the will of My Father  
Who is in Heaven"

If His commandments stand  
that we are to love one another  
and that we are not forgiven if we don't forgive  
If Jesus wasn't only kidding when He said  
"No one can serve two masters  
for either he will hate the one and love the  
other  
or he will be devoted to the one and despise  
the other  
you cannot serve God and mammon"

And  
if the Bible is speaking to present day  
Christians  
when it says  
"As obedient children  
do not be conformed to the passions of your  
former ignorance  
but as He who called you is holy  
be holy yourself in all your conduct"

And if it is true that Jesus is literally coming  
back again  
soon  
for His church  
which is His bride  
and taking only those who have set their  
hearts and minds on Him  
and who have kept themselves pure and  
unspotted  
and have looked for His return

And  
if hell is a reality  
and not just fiction  
or some scare story  
and if those whose lives do not show that they  
love Him with all their hearts  
will be thrown into the lake of fire  
forever

Then - - - - - ?

#### IV - Then Why

Then why don't we more earnestly seek  
fellowship with God?

And why do we reject the love that compelled  
Jesus to die for us?

Why don't we think of heaven as a reality  
and live now like we're getting ready to go  
there  
instead of living like this world is all there is?

Why do we get so carried away by the cares of  
this life  
and exhaust ourselves physically  
and drain ourselves spiritually  
and literally destroy families  
in the pursuit of this world's empty pleasures?

Why do we try to keep up with the ungodly  
around us  
for whom the things of life are the best they  
will ever have?

Why are we so quick to accept the values and  
goals of this world  
which is ruled by Satan  
the one who has eternally set himself against  
God?

Why do we continue to make excuses for  
ourselves  
and try to justify sin in our lives?

Why do we prostitute ourselves  
by using the gifts God gave us for His glory  
to fulfill our own sinful lusts and passions  
in the vain pursuit of self-fulfillment  
instead of using them in His service  
to His glory  
and our lasting joy?

Why are we so often unconcerned about  
denying the attitudes and habits of the old  
sinful nature?

Why are we so ashamed of Christ  
the One who left heaven  
and came to this earth  
to literally bear the punishment for our sin?

Why do we refrain from telling others about Him  
proclaiming His wonderful name everywhere  
we go?

Why do we think we can do what we please  
here on the earth  
and get into heaven because we have gone to  
church  
or avoided certain evils  
or done certain good deeds  
or called ourselves "Christian"?

Why do we tolerate the jealousy  
and bitterness  
and resentment  
that so fill our hearts at times?

Why do we allow the gossip  
and complaining  
and backbiting  
that so divide us as God's family?

Why do we refuse to forgive each other?

Why is the thought of Christ's return distant to  
us  
so distant that many of us don't even think  
about it from one month to another?

Why have so many Christians dismissed hell as  
a reality  
both for those who call Him "Lord"  
but don't obey Him  
and for those who have altogether refused and  
denied His rule in their lives?

## V - It is Simply Because

It is simply because we have again been  
deceived  
by the one who deceived Adam and Eve in the  
garden  
the one whom Jesus crushed by His death  
and resurrection  
for all who believe!

He who has ears to hear  
let him hear

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"Yet even now," says Yahweh, "Return to me with all  
your heart. Fast, weep, and mourn." <sup>13</sup> Tear your  
heart and not only your garments, and return to  
Yahweh your God. For he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abundant in covenant faithfulness,  
and he would like to turn from inflicting punishment.  
Joel 2:12-13

And what agreement is there between the temple of  
God and idols? For we are the temple of the living  
God, just as God said: "I will dwell among them and  
walk among them. I will be their God, and they will  
be my people." <sup>17</sup> Therefore, "Come out from among  
them, and be set apart," says the Lord. "Touch no  
unclean thing, and I will welcome you. <sup>18</sup> I will be a  
Father to you, and you will be my sons and  
daughters," says the Lord Almighty. <sup>1</sup> Loved ones,  
since we have these promises, let us cleanse  
ourselves of everything that makes us unclean in our  
body and spirit. Let us pursue holiness in the fear of  
God. II Cor. 6:16 – 7:1

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one  
who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is  
thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water  
of life without cost. <sup>18</sup> I testify to everyone who hears  
the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone  
adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which  
are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away  
from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will  
take away his part from the tree of life and from the  
holy city, which are written in this book. <sup>20</sup> He who  
testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming  
quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The grace of  
the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. Rev. 22:17-21

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