

CHAPTER ONE

Worship Makes You Attractive to God and Man

The single most life altering, life changing lesson I learned in the Restricted Zone was worship. During my youth I had always allowed emotion to dictate my worship. I thought worship scriptures were worship suggestions that you applied according to your personality. Well, that was all going to change in the Restricted Zone.

In 1996, I attended my first Wara Crusade. It was my first time in Ethiopia. In fact, it was my first time in Africa. I was delightfully shocked when Billy Cole, the leader of the Wara Crusades, issued the invitation. Getting the visa and flights was a whirlwind experience that involved a few miracles. So when it all finally came together, I really felt that it was the will of God to be going.

This particular Wara Crusade was anticipated to be one of the largest Christian gatherings in the world. Previous crusades were deluged with the Spirit and there were many numerous miracles.

I was barely breathing as the bus rounded the hill which elevated us above the plain on which the people were gathering. Still a couple miles away from the crusade site, I could see the panorama laid out below. Some places had what seemed to be rivulets of worker ants while other places had torrents converging on white-domed anthills. Only they weren't ants. They were people. And the anthills were not of earth but large billowing white tents big enough for hundreds of people to find shelter from the scorching white heat of the sun. The tents were pitched in such a fashion that it reminded me of pictures I'd seen of Bedouin encampments.

The crusade was in the middle of nowhere. Literally. The nearest village was at least ten miles away, and the nearest town around one hour. I was hushed in awed amazement. I couldn't help but think that this is the way it was in the Bible when the multitudes came from Jerusalem to see John in the wilderness.

It was the most awesome thing I had ever seen. In addition to the walking thousands, there was a melee of mostly ancient looking vehicles, buses and trucks all jockeying to unload their crowded occupants. Our bus nosed its way diligently and delicately into the throng and then bucked to a stop a full hundred and fifty yards away from the platform where we were to be seated.

Some eighty eyes peered from our bus into the gleaming, dazzling ocean of an estimated eight hundred thousand eyes. On command the bus door sprang open. The previously stifled voices of an eight-hundred member choir came cascading in upon our ears. Inside, our party lined up to alight from the bus. For a few moments, I sat molded to my seat. I stared out in trance-like wonder at the singing, dancing, worshiping choir and crowd.

The choir played the part of Moses parting the Red Sea. Two columns of four-hundred choir members made a road by which the crusade team could travel to the platform. Standing inside the road were ushers uniformed by a special armband and armed with switches. They were apostolic bouncers whose job was to swat the surging crowd if they started reaching between the singers hoping to touch a crusade member.

It was the first time for my ears to hear Amharic, Ethiopia's national language. To me, in that place, at that time, it sounded like the language of angels. The crusade leader told us they had been singing, dancing and worshiping for about two hours before we got there. It was now around nine o'clock in the morning.

I decided to be the last one off the bus. As I peered out of the bus beholding the wonder of their joyous worship, I began to have what I thought might be akin to Biblical flashbacks. This is what it was like when David brought the Ark into Jerusalem. This is what it was like when Jesus made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

The team filed in a neat line between the robed, dancing choir. It was already blazing hot, but there they were, leaping, swaying, and flashing up and down in a rhythmic African beat. Compelled by a deep urge in my spirit, I broke rank and stayed back about ten steps from the rest of the team.

In awe and wonder at the most magnificent display of worship I'd ever seen, I somehow felt that observation and appreciation of their effort was not enough. What I saw demanded participation. Maybe it was my own thoughts, but I had the sense that if I walked among this welcoming throng nodding my head in dignified approval I'd somehow be guilty of insinuating superiority and somehow usurp the praise of Jesus.

There was something I had to do. I had to dance.

I had to dance like they were dancing. I didn't have to, but I so wanted to. I wanted to honor heaven like they were honoring heaven. I wanted to give a sacrifice of praise like they were giving. For me, at that moment, to do less would be, I felt, a sacrilege. That may be a strange thought process, but that is as near as I can explain how I felt.

All I know is that from the bottom of my heart I didn't want to observe. I wanted to participate. I wanted to do my part to bring down the glory cloud of His presence that was already gathering on the people.

So I danced. I danced with all my might. Though the rhythm and style of dance was unlike anything I'd known, it was as if I were born into it. I became aware that as I approached that their volume would intensify. As I passed between them their praise would crescendo. I could see pure approval in their flashing eyes and toothy smiles. They were delighted that I was joining them in praise to the King.

Somewhere en route I decided I'd dance the entire way to the platform. With only half the distance covered and my lungs already beginning to burn, my thought was that this could be the death of me. But, oh, what a way to go!

As I passed through the crowd, the road had collapsed behind me with the choir following on my heels. I stopped at the platform leaving them to pass on to their prescribed place on the far side of the platform. They had been dancing the whole time, so I determined I'd dance until their last member was in place. The parade complete, I watched the national superintendent as he went to the microphone.

The music stopped, and for the first time since our arrival more than a half million feet became reverently still. I bent over sucking in all the oxygen I could get. The national leader gave a welcome and a brief exhortation and the music and choir cranked up again. An ocean of people danced until the dust rose like a morning fog.

The platform was cavernous. We were told it could seat four thousand people. A part of the platform jutted out into the jam-packed audience. They were shoulder to shoulder, front to back for hundreds of feet in all directions. On the jutting portico of the platform, there were about a dozen national leaders and interpreters worshiping with all the passion and zeal I'd ever seen.

I desperately wanted to get out front with them, but being a junior member of the team and not sure if it was proper protocol to be so bold I hesitated. Besides, I could stay toward the back and dance. There was plenty of room, and I'd certainly make less a spectacle of myself. But I wanted to make a spectacle of myself. Not for the sake of being seen by them but to join them, to endorse what they were doing, to let them know that I wanted, like them, to give Jesus the highest praise possible.

So I went to Billy Cole the crusade leader and with a gentle entreaty asked if it would be okay if I were to go out there and dance with the national elders. He told me that it would.

So we danced and twirled and leaped. Shortly the music stopped, and I was again left panting like a racehorse. I was momentarily winded, but it was a great feeling. I had, with all my might, soul and strength tried to put a giant smile on Jesus' face. If worship makes Him happy, then I had joined that massive throng of Ethiopians in an all out effort to give Jesus a thrill. He was worthy of that and so much more.

That is when it happened.

That was when God told me something about worship that I shall never, ever forget.

With my heart pounding and my breathing labored, Jesus leaned toward my ear and whispered these words. "When it's your time to preach do not be afraid. Because you did not come be a spectator, to watch, or a taker to receive,

but you have come to give and have joined my people in their worship, know this: I have joined your heart to their heart and their heart to your heart.”

Worship makes you attractive to God and man.

It would not be until later that I would put it in these terms: Worship makes you attractive to God and man. That was what Jesus was telling me the day I danced on that monstrous concrete platform.

Jesus continued to talk to me. “Don’t stop. Keep up your worship and dancing the whole day long.”

Then I saw, in the Spirit, a needle and thread. With every act of worship, the needle was passing from my heart out to the congregation’s heart and back again.

“If you will continue to worship me with your whole heart, by the time you preach there will be a rope of love from your heart to their heart, and they will receive you as one of their own.”

With such a powerful word from the Lord, I went to the pulpit that afternoon to preach with the most confidence I’d ever had in my life. I was as brave as a lion and without a touch of fear. What a drastic change from what I had been just a few years earlier.

I was the kid who was afraid of his shadow. I grew up in rural America, population nine hundred. As a teenager, I’d go to parties and most usually sit quietly in a corner. For the most part, folks didn’t know when I came or when I left. I was moody, fearful and pretty much loathed myself.

It took me five years to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit because I was so self-conscious. I was a teenager who went to youth camp his first time and came home with exactly zero new friends. Several years later during a powerful camp meeting, God distinctly called me into the ministry. I was eighteen, but I never told a soul until I was twenty-three because I thought that even God couldn’t straighten out my warped insecurities and moodiness.

So to go before such an awesome crowd with such confidence was truly a God thing, evidence of His transforming power. And it happened just like Jesus said it would. For from the moment I opened my mouth, there was an instant connection in the Spirit. The crowd got loud and exuberant. The verbal response of the crowd was so strong that it was estimated that as many as seventy-five thousand people who had wandered off to the tents in the heat of the day came racing back upon hearing the energetic response of the crowd.

Why? How? It was a divine attraction. For two days I had worshiped with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. In doing so, I had tied a thousand spiritual threads from my heart to their heart and back again.

Worship made a previously very unattractive person exceptionally attractive.

When I became confident that God could make me a vessel of honor for His glory, and when I worshiped him with such confidence, God would tell me more about worship, saying, "That is beautiful. That is what you were created for, to be set free from your bondages and insecurities and to trust in my power to make something beautiful out of your life. I find that love, that security, that confidence you have in me very attractive."

I have learned that once God is attracted, you enter the bonus phase. Spiritual people, lovers of God, are attracted to the same thing God is attracted to. People who themselves are trying to get a hold on God are attracted to you because they recognize the active ingredients of love, hope and faith at work in your life. They intuitively know that what they are witnessing in you, as a worshipper, is that you are a God-work. Since they too are a God-work in progress, they are attracted to you and want to listen to your story of growth, grace and guidance.

You may be asking, "Well that is a good theory, but do you have any Bible for it?"

Yes. I do.

* * *

The stately halls of the united kingdom whispered in hushed reverence their saddened state. David, the beloved, was at the end of his magnificent reign. It only took a few minutes for news of the summons to dissipate through the palace grounds like the soft, gentle latter rain of a coming harvest. They had sent for the royal stenographer. He would soon arrive to capture David's last words. They must be preserved.

The writer wants to honor David. He wants to give him the best epitaph possible. No one, not one man has ever extended and enlarged the kingdom of God like David. No one, not one has ever inspired so many men to rise from the shallow halls of obscurity to the lofty peaks of nobility like David. What was it about David that allowed him to take the outcast rabble of his society and train them, tutor them? Not only rescuing them from ignominy, but also turning them into the heroes called David's mighty men.

What was his gift? What was his talent? What was the appeal of a man who could command such devotion as to mention, in a sigh of wishing, his desire for a drink of water from a well reminiscent of the safer, simpler days of his boyhood shepherding? And upon hearing this wish, grown men, warriors, well aware of the danger of their attempt would proceed to break through a bloody siege to get this David a canteen of Bethlehem's water?

What could make men love a man so much? The answer is in the prologue of the court recorder. In simple precise words, he gives us the best explanation as to why David's last words would be so important to them.

He identifies what makes David, David.

The secret of David's life is encapsulated in both what is said and what is not said.

With quill bloodied in royal ink, the writer inhales in slow deliberate breaths. His mind filters back through all he knows, all he remembers, and all he has been told about David, and he writes:

*"Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said,
and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob,*

and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,"
(2 Samuel 23:1).

"He is the son of Jesse. Who is Jesse? The only reason we know Jesse is because he had a David."

Go on.

"David is the one who was raised up on high. And how did that happen? Who could have imagined that Jesse's David could have come from where he was and be raised to where he is. There is only one explanation to his being raised up on high: he was the anointed of God. Oh! To be God's anointed!"

But tell us, royal stenographer, what is the explanation of his anointing? Is it because David was a great warrior, a great general? Was it because he was a master swordsman, a terror on the battlefield? Was that his appeal? Was that his attraction? Wait. Wait. I know. It's because he was a giant killer. David, a slingshot shepherd boy, dispatched the most feared battle-hardened champion the armies of Philistia had ever mustered, the foul-mouthed, nine-foot Goliath of Gath.

None of these qualifications are mentioned. Not general, not giant killer, not slayer of bear and lion, and it never even calls him king. When the writer wanted to give David the highest honor he could bestow, when he wanted to point out precisely what made David, David, when he wanted us to know why they loved him so very, very much, he simply calls him "the sweet psalmist of Israel," or in other words, "Israel loves David because he is the best worship leader we've ever known!"

"Exactly! No one ever showed us and taught us to worship like David. Nobody ever led us into the presence of Almighty God like David. We were nobodies going nowhere until David taught us how to be worshippers.

"What makes David, David, is not how great he slings but how great he sings. His greatness is in the songs he composes, the way he dances and shouts for joy. It is his consistent, persistent, never-dying adoration of Jehovah God that makes us adore him. We love David because he taught us by example how to come into the presence of Almighty God."

Here is David's secret. He was not a warrior who worshiped. He was a worshipper who made war. Big difference! A warrior who worships is dependent upon the circumstances of war. Victory on the battlefield makes me feel like worshiping. Failure on the battlefield makes me feel like giving in to my bad circumstances and stifling my worship. Those close to David understood that his worship did not depend upon his exploits, but that his exploits depended upon his worship.

A lot of people want David's results without David's works. They want David's victory without David's vigor. They want David's blessing without David's sacrifice.

You can't have the first without the second. Results, victory and blessing come out of character not circumstances.

David was worshipper first and king second. David was a man who had his priorities right.

Oh, that I might be known as a worshipper.

Not a great preacher, not a great missionary, but as a great worshipper.

In heaven, there are no preachers. In heaven, there are no pastors. In heaven, there are no presbyters or superintendents. In heaven, there are no big churches or little churches, no famous preachers or little-known preachers, no great successes or little successes. In heaven there are only worshippers; former sinners saved by grace, adoring the King!

"Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!'"
(Revelation 5:11-12, New King James Version).

All of our résumés of greatness, prestige, acclaim and success don't matter in heaven. What matters in heaven is if we know how to worship.

At the very top of his résumé, David was an extravagant worshiper! And the people loved him for it. Well, not everybody. Saul's daughter didn't like it.

“And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers: David also had upon him an ephod of linen. Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps. And it came to pass, as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing: and she despised him in her heart”
(1 Chronicles 15:27-29).

David really got it when he walked back into his home!

*“Then David returned to bless his household.
And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David,
and said, How glorious was the king of Israel today,
who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants,
as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!”*
(2 Samuel 6:20).

David came home thrilled with what was probably the happiest day of his life. He had just fulfilled one of his greatest dreams and ambitions, bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. He was joyful, fulfilled and thrilled to be alive. When he walked through the door, it was not the expected honey, I'm so proud of you. But instead, it's wham, up side of the head!

The biggest accomplishment of his life was belittled and ravaged by a worship degrader. She proved she didn't have a clue about the real David when she in effect cut him down. “You made a fool of yourself today. What were you thinking disrobing from your kingly attire and putting on the crass clothes of a lowly Levite? You neither looked like nor acted like

a king. I couldn't tell you from one of a thousand other commoners. Your moronic behavior just totally destroyed your approval ratings."

May I paraphrase David's answer?

"Maybe I should be thanking you Michal? It is precisely your type of behavior, your family trait of pride and saving face that gave me a chance to be king. I think you learned it from your dad. But, in any case, you are an arrogant, pompous, worship degrader. I'm not falling into the pride trap that surrounds your family. I'm not ashamed to humble myself before Jehovah God who rejected your father because of his stubbornness and pride, and instead chose me to rule his people. Oh yeah Miss High Society? I've got bad news. You haven't seen the worst of it."

"And I will be even more undignified than this..."
(2 Samuel 6:22a, NKJV).

"You say people are going to be turned off? Not true. In fact, the opposite is true. I will be held in HONOR!"

*"...But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken,
by them I will be held in honor"*
(2 Samuel 6:22b, NKJV).

I find it interesting that throughout this account the scripture does not call her David's wife, but it always refers to her as the daughter of Saul. It is as if the writer wants to distance her attitude and actions as far from David as possible. He wants us to know her DNA was totally different from David's and that she's nothing like him.

It seems that she had at one time had some kind of love for him. Maybe it was the image or the fame that she was in love with. In any case, it's obvious that she never really knew the man or his God because to know the man and his God was to understand his extravagant worship.

Michal's attitude was a family problem. The Bible has little record of Saul's worship. There is no record that he opposed worship, but it seems that he just didn't do it. His lethargic, lackluster worship resulted in a devastating heritage.

All you have to do to teach your children to despise worship is to do nothing! Just fold your arms and sit. Don't say anything. Just teach them through your attitudes and actions. People do it every Sunday. They come in, park their carcass in a seat and do a very good impersonation of a Michelangelo marble statue. The claim is this: "If I don't feel like worshipping, then I won't because it doesn't affect anyone but me."

Really? Ask any worship leader. They will tell you that is simply not true.

Think about the pallbearers at a funeral service and their job of carrying out the casket? It takes six strong, healthy men to carry out a dead body. Well, when a person comes to church and sits like a corpse, I propose that it takes six strong, vibrant worshipers to counter a dead spirit.

Please remember this the next time you are tempted to impersonate granite. If you can't muster a dance, at least tap your toes. If you can't rally a runaround, then at least wave a hand. For the sake of sinners, please don't make the congregation struggle with your dead corpse.

It seems that God is not fond of this attitude either.

*"Therefore [because of, as a result, for that reason]
Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death"
(2 Samuel 6:23, author's notes in brackets).*

I don't know if her barrenness was biological or social. It could have been that David thought her conduct was so repulsive to him and to God that David had no desire to be intimate with her.

I do know this. Failure to understand and appreciate worship is an intimacy issue. Refusal to worship renders it impossible for you to be intimate with Jesus.

* * *

Paul and Silas, on summons by a vision from the Lord to Macedonia, arrived in the perfect will of God. They went about doing good and preaching the Gospel. But instead of getting a good citizen's award for

liberating a young lady from demonic spirits, they were arrested, beaten, put in stocks and thrust into the inner prison.

*“And when they had laid many stripes upon them,
they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely:
Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison,
and made their feet fast in the stocks”
(Acts 16:23-24).*

If there was an inner prison, then it follows logical reason that there was an outer prison. In modern terms, I'd called the inner prison maximum security and the outer prison the GPP, where the general prison population is held.

*“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed
and sang praises unto God and the prisoners heard them.
And suddenly there was a great earthquake,
so that the foundations of the prison were shaken:
and immediately all the doors were opened,
and every one's bands were loosed”
(Acts 16:25-26).*

This is more than a little mindless clapping on Sunday. More than jigging to the music during worship service. This is lifestyle praise—lifestyle worship.

I don't think their objective was freedom. I don't think they were praying for deliverance. I think they just wanted to worship rather than to worry.

You can't worship and worry at the same time. You can't pose or pretend and praise at the same time. When you choose to do one you render the other obsolete.

Circumstances were trying to convince them they were out of the will of God, so they chose to nix that notion with some mood-altering worship. When you don't feel it, sing it till you do.

Whatever the case, the result of their worship was a huge jailbreak.

Here is truth and wisdom: Worship liberates! Unlike anything else, worship has the power to unchain and unshackle.

Here we see the exceeding power of worship. Their worship did much more than please God and impact their personal life; it impacted everyone around them.

Scripture records that the ensuing, praise-induced earthquake left every door in the prison standing wide open. The callous, cruel-hearted jailer supposed that all the prisoners had escaped and decided he'd rather die a quick merciful death at his own hands than to die a slow torturous one at the hands of his superiors. So he prepared to commit suicide.

*“But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying,
Do thyself no harm: for we are all here”
(Acts 16:28).*

Question. How did Paul know that they were all there?

Answer. Before he yelled out, he did a quick headcount! How could he have done that? He could see the prisoners. Because instead of exiting the open doors of the outer prison, the prisoners instead ran deeper into the inner prison where the worshippers were!

I've done prison ministry for more than ten years. I know a bit about inmate psychology. Prisoners finding themselves with sudden open doors would consider them a long awaited answer to prayer and stampede the nearest exit. Here it was. Their lucky day. The perfect opportunity to escape their brutal plight, but instead of running out *they ran in!* Why?

What would make a prisoner bypass the perfect prison break? To me there is only one explanation. In a blinding light of revelation, Paul's prison mates understood that the only people who were really free and really liberated were those who could worship the walls down.

They came running to Paul and Silas because they knew that these men knew the truth about freedom. Real freedom isn't on the outside; it's on the inside. More than liberation of the body, they wanted liberation of the soul.

They wanted something that could make you sing when your back is beaten bloody. They wanted something that could keep you joyous even when things don't work out the way you planned. They wanted to know more about a power that can make your soul and spirit free even when your feet and hands are bound.

When they cranked up that midnight chorus, Paul and Silas weren't following the most recent guidelines in the politically correct guidance manual. When they first began, no doubt, maximum security echoed with a few intimidating shouts: "Shut up you idiots! We're trying to get some sleep out here. I'm warning you, you little bug-eyed scrawny, weasel of a preacher! I'll rip your arms off if you don't close your yapping mouth."

Logically thinking, when you're not sure how long you'll be staying, you really don't want to tick off Lester the Molester on your first night in the poky.

But Paul and Silas weren't worried. They knew the truth about real, heartfelt, impassioned praise—it makes you attractive to God and to man.

Paul: "Is there any more left, Mr. Philippian Jailer?"

Jailer: "No, that's the entire family. All have been baptized in Jesus name."

Silas: "Wow! What a song, and what a worship service!"

Paul: "What a Savior! What a friend! What a Jesus! This is what life is all about."

Some sound advice for this day and age in the Restricted Zone. Don't be politically correct—be biblically correct—and remember that worship makes you attractive to both God and man.

