

Psalm 27:4: *"One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple."*

There are two main aspects of worship. One is our love and adoration of Him – the inward; the other is our expression of love through submission – the outward. Although we think of songs and words and other expressions as worship, worship can never be separated from obedience and submission. In fact, the first time the word "worship" is used in the Bible is in the context of Abraham's obedience in putting Isaac on the alter. But for this week, we want to focus on the first aspect: learning what it is, and how to worship God from the inside out. The outward will reflect the inward. Jesus said *"If you love Me, you will keep My commands."* (John 14:15) He also said, *"My commandments are not burdensome."* (I John 5:3) When we love Him from the inside out, there will be the fruit of obedience.

An inward craving

Every one of us was created with an inward craving. The Bible says that all creation groans (Romans 8:22). Even the lost people in this world - those who are drunk in bars, committing adultery, murderers, those who are full of anger, bitterness, and hatred – have an inward intense craving to connect with God. That was God's desire from the very beginning. Jesus, our example, paved the way to worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

Matthew 11:29: *"Jesus said, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me. '"*

He also prayed in John 17:21, *"that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us."* Our Father God desires that we be one with Him, just as Jesus is one with Him.

Read the following verses and learn from Jesus about His connection with His Father. Write down a key phrase from each that shows us how Jesus models unity with the Father.

John 5:19: *"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*

John 5:30: *"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but Him who sent Me."*

John 12:49: *"For I did not speak of My own accord, but the Father who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it."*

John 14:10: *"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to You are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work."*

1 Peter 2:21: *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps."*

Two Hindrances to Communion with God: our flesh and our "place mentality"

1. Our natural man

God is a Spirit; He wants to connect with us in spirit. He wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Look up and write out 1 Corinthians 6:17.

"But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in spirit."

Our minds cannot connect with God; only our regenerated spirit man can. Union with God's Spirit is the missing link in the life of every carnal and earthly minded person. To satisfy the latent hunger for union with our Creator, there are steps we must take that are unnatural for us. One reason for this is that our natural man is constantly battling our spirit man.

Our natural man, also called our soul, is comprised of our mind, our will, and our emotions. Our natural man demands to understand God. Many Christians believe that simply reading the Bible and studying it will satisfy their desire for relationship with God. It is true that we are to worship in spirit and in truth, but reading the Bible by itself without experiencing Him is not enough. You can get insight, but there is a communion with the Lord that He desperately wants that can only be achieved when there is a mixing of the Spirit and the Word. In worship, the Lord prompts us with scripture. He uses His word to speak deep things to us.

Look up and read 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3. List everything that profits us nothing if we do not have love.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

You can have power, preach, do miracles, and have all the Bible knowledge that a human can possess – but the fellowship of the Holy Spirit – a love relationship with Him – is another dimension we must have before we can truly represent Jesus here on earth. A wonder of God is that as we see Him we become more like Him. The Refiner's fire purifies our soul, and we begin to be transformed into His likeness.

Malachi 3:2: *"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap."*

2 Corinthians 3:18: *"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*

Read John 1:1-4.

John tells us that Jesus is the Word and that He is our source of life. Later in the book of John we are actually told to eat Jesus' flesh. This makes sense in the spirit if we see Him as our source, our food, our sustenance. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit pours out on us, we receive more of Him. The more of God inside of us, the more of our soul and spirit that is occupied with Him, then the more attraction and union there is.

John 6:35-40, 50-51: *"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'*

But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

We are to consume Him, and then He will consume us! He's a consuming fire.

Deuteronomy 4:24: *"For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."*

He is jealous for us! When we are anointed with God's presence and glory, there is an attraction. He is attracted to us, and we are attracted to Him. The more we open up to the Lord, the more we receive of His presence and revelation. The Lord wants our hearts and to have an intimate relationship with us. He wants us to choose Him.

2. The "Place Mentality" - an incomplete perspective

Another reason for the difficulty we have in connecting with God's Spirit is that most of us have a mindset that God is in Heaven while we are on earth. Our "place mentality" is three dimensional and limited to our understanding. We are to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10) What is His will? What is going on in Heaven right now? The Bible says Heaven is a pure celebration of Him.

From Revelation 4:10-11, what are the Elders (faithful overcomers) doing? How often do they do it? What are they saying?

"The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'"

The elders never grow tired of worshipping Him. How can we experience Heaven on earth? If the elders are worshipping 24/7, are we not to do that? If God wants the same thing happening here as in Heaven, does He not want us to be near experiencing communion with Him all the time?

The Garden and Heaven – a complete perspective

We need to break from our natural, tangible, visible, 3-dimensional perception to look into the experience of Adam and Eve, the only humans who had complete union with God and to see heaven as more than a place.

The Garden Experience

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had 24-hour God-consciousness. God was with them all the time. Adam and Eve did not go in and out of the presence of God – they were always in it. They had complete union and oneness with God's presence. The atmosphere of the Garden was the presence of God. The air they breathed was His glory. The Holy Spirit hovered there.

Adam and Eve ate freely from the Tree of Life. What does it mean to eat freely from it? The Tree of Life is experiential knowledge. It is revelation. It is to experience the life of God. As hungry as they were for God, they could freely eat from the Tree of Life and taste and see that the Lord is good. God told them, "Have as much as you want of who I am." In this fruit He gave the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. They experienced His presence through the fruit of the Tree of Life.

We think of the Garden of Eden as a place – a paradise. If we could physically go there we could have the experience that Adam and Eve had – fellowship and communion with God. What must that have been like? Would it not be wonderful to be able to eat freely from the Tree of Life?

But the Garden of Eden was more than just a place – it was an experience. And God tells us that we can also eat from the Tree of Life and have experiential knowledge of Him (Revelation 22:14).

Heaven

We also think of Heaven as “just a place”. We say things like, “I cannot wait to get to Heaven,” and “oh, to be absent from my body and present with the Lord,” or “One day God has a mansion prepared for me in Heaven”. We often proclaim, “In Heaven there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, no more bills, and no more problems.”

We have the mentality that the Garden of Eden and Heaven are simply places. Both are places, but because we have the “place mentality”, we do not experience what God has for us now.

When Jesus talked about the “Kingdom of Heaven,” often He was not referring to the place that we are going one day in the future.

Read the following verses and underline where the Kingdom of Heaven is:

Matthew 4:17: *“From that time on Jesus began to preach,
'Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near.'”*

Luke 17:21: *“Nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.”*

If we have the “place” mentality, we struggle to lay hold of the experience of the Holy Spirit and have intimacy with God. God wants to awaken God-consciousness in our spirit. Jesus shed his blood for the remission of our sins, and through his death and resurrection God opened the veil that gives us access to experience as much of God as we want.

From Hebrews 10:19-22, what can we do in unqualified assurance and in absolute trust?

“...we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God in faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

Out of the Garden

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were taken out of the Garden (the place), but they were also taken out of a degree of the glory and intimacy of God that they had enjoyed. When He took them out, the first thing He did was place angels at the entrance so they could not get back in and have access to the Tree of Life. He took away His manifest presence. But complete relationship with Him was not cut off. In Genesis 4:26, it says that "*men called on the name of the Lord.*" Enoch walked with God and then was no more (Genesis 5:24). There was a degree of God's presence even though God had taken away the Tree of Life. Jesus had not yet come to make a way for them to come boldly before the throne of grace and mercy, into the Holy of Holies. But through His mercy, God had relationship with His people outside of the Garden.

In the church today, many have an "out of the Garden" experience. We do not relate to God on the level that He has made available. We settle for the life we have – for whatever level we think God wants us to have. We do not stir ourselves to reach higher levels.

We can have a Garden of Eden / Kingdom of Heaven experience! Jesus demonstrated the kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, and you have the ability to tap into every spiritual blessing with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3). We have the potential to understand our inheritance – the limitless anointing purchased by Jesus. The blood of the Lamb has made a way for us to be restored to what Adam and Eve had in the Garden.

An Open Heaven

Many have seen by the Spirit an open heaven over our church. The open heaven comes from the ministry of the Holy Spirit who manifests Himself in response to our worship. He is a gentleman and only comes when invited. He will flow through our meetings and our souls when welcomed, and fill the place with His glory. No evil can stand in His presence. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is more powerful than direct confrontation with the devil. It is an act of warfare to make a deep connection with the Lord. It is more powerful than taking authority over demons – demons bow their knee to someone who has been with God. Worship cleanses us and puts us in a place where the devil has nothing on us.

John 14:30: "... *the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.*"

God is enthroned by our praises far above every ruler and authority that Satan can send our way (Psalm 22:3). Our high praises are like a sword against the enemy (Psalm 149:6-6).

The River of Life flows over our church because of the worship of intercessors like you. Press in for more love and deeper revelation. God cannot be fooled by a fake relationship. He is omnipotent, and He is looking for honesty, humility, and the fear of the Lord. As worshippers we bow our knee to Him, and He reveals the truth that He is Lord. We fall in love with Him and ask Him, "Lord, What can I do for You?" If you love Him, you will obey His commandments.

Some Practical Ideas

So how do we get there? How do we lose ourselves in worship? Use anything that will put your total focus on Him – reading the Bible, listening to sermons online, and filling the atmosphere with anointed music. Cultivate a desire to see Him more clearly.

We have many opportunities for corporate worship at our church. Prayer and worship are the foundation of our church. In our meetings God is welcome, and we come face to face with Him. The Word builds our faith, and the anointed music touches our soul and gets us in alignment with God. But the flow of the Spirit of God in our meetings will be the cumulative effect of the depth of the individual connection with God that we each have. Therefore, get alone with Him – not just to pray through your outlines, but to see Him face to face. Find a quiet place to meet with Him. Many worshippers like the car as a meeting place with God; because they can sing or scream or cry, and no one else will hear!

Acquire a collection of songs that stir your spirit. What songs do you love to sing at church? Has God ever given you a song in the morning when you wake up? There are songs that build our faith. Songs that we sang as children – perhaps hymns filled with rich lyrics. If you hear a song that touches you, ask about it. Compile a list. The Lord has an incredible array of music available to us. There is a door in the spirit through music tailor-made for each of us.

The list of songs that stir us may evolve over time. There are stages of higher and higher revelation that we acquire through worship. At first we may love songs of praise, joy, and dancing because of the great salvation God has given us. Then we may move to songs that cut through our soul and cleanse us. We weep and ask God to cleanse us. He is pure and we become aware of Him and our own weakness. Then we may go back to the songs of joy because of our thankfulness. We will have seasons of awe and wonder where we crave songs of deep intimacy. We become broken and willing to be martyrs because He has taken us over. We cry out, "More of Him, less of me." That is God's ultimate goal.

In our technological world there are many ways to get music to our ears. CDs, streaming music, and playlists on your phone are wonderful tools for worship. Be willing to make worship through music a priority. It will have a financial cost, but it will be worth it.

Prayer Assignment for Week Four

Spend time resting in God's presence this week. Compile a list of songs that assist you in connecting with Him. If you already have music you love, add some new songs.

You may want to join other worshippers at a corporate prayer meeting. Focus on the Lord and cultivate 24-hour God-consciousness. Journal your conversations with God.