



## The LORD Wants Empty Worship Like He Wants You to Snap a Dog's Neck (He doesn't)

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### Devotion and Discussion Questions

**Key Texts (TLV):** *Is 66:1-4; Is. 65:2, 17, 24-25; Ps. 50:16-17; Ps. 51:18-19; Amos 5:21-24; Jer. 7:4-15; Mic. 6:8; 2 Pet. 1:3-11*

Isaiah 66 opens with a final and deeply personal plea from the Lord. After painting the breathtaking picture of the new heavens and new earth in Isaiah 65, the Lord brings His people back to the core issue: not outward religion, but the heart. He had been calling to them long before they ever sought Him. He stretched out His hands all day long to a rebellious people, pleading with them to return to the path of life. The invitation was still open, but so was the warning. There was a way that led toward life, blessing, and glory, and there was a way that led toward destruction. The Lord desired that His people would choose life.

Yet the danger was that people would reduce walking with God to external religious activity. They would focus on sacrifices, rituals, temple-building, fasting, and ceremonies while neglecting the heart behind it all. The Lord had already confronted this mindset in Isaiah 58, reminding His people that fasting without justice, mercy, humility, and love was empty. Worship was never meant to be a tool for controlling God or getting our own way. It was meant to awaken us to hear His voice, to love Him, and to reflect His character. Isaiah 66 brings us back to that reality with startling clarity.

### 1. GOD IS NOT LOOKING FOR IMPRESSIVE RELIGION, BUT HUMBLE HEARTS

The Lord begins by reminding His people of who He is: *"Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool."* (*Is. 66:1*) He is not limited by temples, buildings, or human accomplishments. Everything that exists was made by His hands. The mountains, oceans, waterfalls, and stars are already His creation. There is nothing we can construct that will somehow impress Him or provide something He lacks. Even the Temple itself was only a shadow pointing toward something greater. The Lord's desire has never been centered on grand displays of religion, but on hearts that truly belong to Him.

Then the Lord answers His own question: *"But on this one will I look, one humble and of a contrite spirit, who trembles at My word."* (*Is. 66:2*) This is where He desires to dwell. The heart that attracts the gaze of God is not proud, self-sufficient, or hardened. It is the heart that recognizes its desperate need for Him. A contrite heart is teachable. It listens. It responds. It trembles at His word rather than pushing His word aside. The Lord finds beauty in humility because humility creates space for transformation. God is not searching for perfect performers. He is looking for surrendered worshipers.

### 2. EMPTY WORSHIP IS OFFENSIVE TO THE LORD

Isaiah 66:3 contains some of the strongest language in the entire chapter. The Lord compares sacrifices He Himself commanded to horrifying and unclean acts. Sacrificing an ox becomes like murdering a man. Offering a lamb becomes like snapping a dog's neck. Burning incense becomes like blessing an idol. The issue was not the sacrifices themselves. The issue was the

heart behind them. The people were performing religious acts while continuing to pursue their own ways. They honored God outwardly while resisting Him inwardly. Their worship was disconnected from obedience, love, justice, and humility.

This warning reaches deeply into our own lives as well. It is possible to sing songs, attend services, quote Scripture, and participate in religious activities while still refusing to surrender our hearts to God. We can maintain the appearance of worship while clinging tightly to pride, bitterness, selfishness, or rebellion. The Lord is not fooled by religious performance. He desires worship that flows from transformed hearts. *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”* (Ps. 51:19) True worship is not merely about what happens in sacred moments; it is about whether our lives are becoming aligned with His character.

### **3. THE LORD RESPONDS TO THE WAYS WE CHOOSE**

Isaiah 66:4 reveals the sobering outcome of persistent rebellion: *“For when I called, no one answered; when I spoke, they did not listen.”* The tragedy was not that God remained silent. The tragedy was that the people refused to respond. They continually chose their own ways over His ways. They delighted in what God did not delight in. Their religion became a cover for self-rule rather than a pathway toward surrender. Instead of trusting the Lord, they pursued false securities, trying to control their future through empty practices and outward appearances.

Yet even within this warning, the heart of God is still visible. He continued calling. He continued stretching out His hands. His desire was always restoration, not destruction. The Lord wanted His people to hear Him, to return to Him, and to walk in His ways. That same invitation remains open today. God is not asking for perfected performance. He is asking for hearts that are willing to listen, repent, trust, and follow. The question is not whether we know religious language or outward rituals. The question is whether we truly desire what delights the Lord.

### **CONCLUSION**

Isaiah 66 reminds us that the heart of worship is not found in outward religion alone. God is not searching for impressive displays, spiritual performances, or carefully maintained appearances. He is searching for humble hearts that tremble at His word. He desires worshipers who love justice, walk humbly, and reflect His character in everyday life. Empty religion may fool people for a season, but it never satisfies the heart of God.

The Lord still calls out, *“Here I am.”* He still invites us to turn from our own ways and walk in His. The beautiful promise woven throughout Isaiah is that glory awaits His servants—those who truly belong to Him. Today is an opportunity to stop settling for outward activity while neglecting inward surrender. The Lord does not want empty worship any more than He wanted the meaningless sacrifices Isaiah described. He wants our hearts. He wants lives that reflect His goodness, mercy, and holiness. May we respond to His voice with humility and wholehearted devotion.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why do you think people naturally drift toward outward religion instead of inward surrender?
2. What does it practically mean to “tremble” at the word of the Lord in everyday life?
3. In what ways can religious activity become disconnected from genuine love, justice, and humility?
4. Are there areas of your life where you are honoring God outwardly while resisting Him inwardly? How can you begin surrendering those areas to Him?
5. What would it look like for your daily life—not just your worship gatherings—to reflect the heart and character of God more fully?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

*Avinu Malkhenu*, Our Father, Our King, thank You for continuing to call out to us with mercy and patience. Thank You that You are not searching for perfect performances, but for humble hearts that desire to know and follow You. Forgive us for the times we have settled for outward religion while neglecting the deeper work You desire to do within us.

Teach us to tremble at Your word again. Give us soft hearts that are quick to listen, quick to repent, and eager to walk in Your ways. Form Your character within us so that our worship is not empty, but genuine and alive. May our lives reflect Your justice, mercy, humility, and love.

*B'Shem Yeshua*, In the name of Yeshua, amen.