

Leading us into a "Face to Face" Encounter with... GOD!!!

The very first aspect that every born again believer in Christ must understand and recognize is that our God, Yahweh Adonai, is a relationship oriented and driven God. He created Man to have close, personal, intimate relationship with Him. Throughout the scriptures we read that God designed and desired for Man to be the only creation to truly know His heart and be His representative figure here on this earth. In Genesis 1:26, we are told that we were made in His image and

likeness. In John 4:24, we read that, "God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and truth." In Thessalonians 5:23, we read that we are a "tri-part" being - spirit, soul and body. Therefore, we are able to have fellowship and relationship with God. Jeremiah 23:23-24, speaks of God's desire to have relationship with His people and expresses that God is never far away and that we cannot hide from Him. Deuteronomy 34:10 says the Lord knew Moses "face to face," which implies close relationship.

In this relationship we must be aware that it is God who desires and takes the initiative in meeting with His people "face to face". Read the following scriptures to see how God the Father and Jesus always initiated the relationship experience. The very heart of God is to be with His people.

- *Luke 24:15 – Jesus, after His resurrection, came and communed with His people so that they would be able to understand and enter into relationship with God.*
- *John 21:4-12 - Jesus came to the disciples and initiated this time of fellowship as well as preparing a meal for them to "come and dine".*
- *Genesis 3:8 – Walking in the garden and speaking with His creation was a common thing for God to do. They heard and knew whose footsteps they were because they had heard them so many times before.*
- *John 20:26 – Jesus looked upon Thomas as being important enough to come personally to reveal Himself to Thomas. That is how much He desires to have relationship with His people.*
- *Revelation 3:20 – Jesus is the one who comes to the "door of your heart" and knocks. He initiates the relationship now made available to all people.*

The Worship Leader is to lead worshippers into a "face to face" encounter with God. The expressing of our worship is the action of our desire to meet with the Lord. We must turn towards God's face. However, we must realize that it is a response to the love that God has for us in the first place. In Exodus 24:9-11, God came from heaven to the top of Mt. Sinai. Moses responded to God's invitation and went up to the top so they could meet face to face. In Luke 21, Jesus came to the shoreline to meet the disciples. The disciples had to come from where they were in the boat out on the water to the shore to meet and dine with Jesus face to face. When we meet face to face with our God, we can truly partake in the spiritual abundance of the Lord, which will satisfy the hunger and thirsting of our soul. The most important thing that we must grasp is that we, as God's children, always have an open invitation to meet "face to face" with the Lord.

God's love for us, and His desire to have intimate relationship with His people, is the basis and the foundation of the worship experience. Below is what I call the "Cycle of Worship". It begins with God's love (remember God is the initiator of the experience) and ends with our response to God's love.

- God is love (He loves His creation unconditionally – agape love)
- God's love "breeds" God's grace (His unearned favor towards us)
- God's grace "breeds" God's mercy (He saw our need for salvation and did something to meet the need – He sent Jesus)
- God's grace and mercy "breeds" God's peace (reconciliation back to Him)
- God's grace + mercy + peace = God's love experienced (We experience God's love through salvation and all that that encompasses).

The following are scriptural references for this.

- Ps. 27-5 – (amp) "hid me in His shelter", "in His tent" (dwelling place); (NIV), "He will keep me safe"
- Ps. 31:19, 20 – (amp) "take refuge in You", "hides us from harm"; (NIV) "In the shelter of your presence".
- Ps. 81:7 – "secret place of thunder" – under His "cloud of glory" which was upon Mt. Sinai which represented God's presence – the "shekinah glory" of God.
- Ps. 91:1 – (amp) – dwelling in the presence of God keeps us stable and fixed "whose power no foe can withstand"; (NIV) – He who dwells in the shelter...will rest in the shadow of the Almighty (El Shaddai) – under His "glory cloud".

The term "Secret Place" means to be under a covering, to be hidden away from harm, to be protected. It implies being in the very presence of God. A Worship Leader must desire to enter into this "secret place" and bring our fellow worshippers along with us. It is called a "secret place" because not everyone knows about it or how to get there. It is available to God's people through the blood of the Lamb, which allows us access into the "Secret Place". The Holy Spirit knows the way and leads us on to know the "path" to this secret place. Results of entering into the "secret place" are revealed in these scriptures.

- Psalm 91:1 – As was already stated – stability and protection
- Daniel 11:32 – We will be able to know God (recognizing, seeing, and experiencing first hand, through observation and relationship who our God is) we will be able to do exploits. (NAS – display strength and actions; NIV – resist the evil one; AMP – prove themselves strong and to stand firm)

Continuity in Times of Personal and Corporate Worship Allowing us to be Lead into that "Secret Place"

Worship should be a smooth, flowing, Holy Spirit lead and filled experience for both the worship leader and the worshipper. There should be somewhat of an "order" involved in our worship. Easy - don't get excited!! Sometimes when the word "order" is used we immediately think of the aspect of "liturgy" which for many is a "dirty word." It really is not that bad of a term when understood correctly, however, that is for another discussion. Having "order" does not mean that we do not leave room for spontaneity or the "prophetic." Quite the contrary is true. God is a God of order and peace, not confusion. We see in creation that there was a definite order for creation (Genesis 1). When there is order, there is no room for confusion. Order allows for God's presence and peace to surround us. This in turn allows us to hear from the Holy Spirit. Order relieves the pressure of having to be "on" all the time, at that very moment. Therefore, it also helps to eliminate the Worship Leader's propensity to "force" something that is not there, which can lead to many other problems. The thought I am trying to bring forth is that we need not limit **when** the Holy Spirit will speak to us concerning **what** He wants to accomplish and **where** He desires to bring us in those times of corporate worship. He can speak to us in our preparation time prior to the event. He may speak to us during the week. Or, yes He can speak to you in the midst of that time of Worship. Whichever, it may be - do not limit God!!! As long as the attitude of our heart is pure, He will direct us and we will be able to know what He is doing and where He is leading us.

An example of general Flow of Worship could be as follow.

- We worship God through Praise and Thanksgiving – entering into His presence with a grateful heart and proclaiming through expressions of praise such as singing, dancing, clapping, instruments of music, banners and flags, etc., who our God and celebrating Him as His people. We desire to “bless the heart of our King.”
- We enter into a time of intimate relationship, bringing each of the participants into having a one to one, face to face experience with the “Desire of our heart.” We are brought to that place where we express our love, adoration, wonder and awe unto God, both corporately and personally.
 - During these first two aspects of the worship experience, there should also be somewhat of an order. This can involve the songs that we pick out to play as well as other expressions of worship. There should be a sense of flow. Entering into His presence is a joyful time of great expectations – TO MEET WITH MY GOD. When we are in His presence we should be now expressing to God from our heart to His heart, our spirit to His Spirit, our innermost love.
- We worship God by allowing Him to minister to His Body and yielding to His voice- this can happen through the gifts of tongues, interpretation, and prophecy.
- We continue to worship through our physical supply – tithes and offerings.
- We can then enter into a time of worship by listening, hearing and studying His Word through the preaching of the Pastor/Teacher, Evangelist, Prophet, or Apostle - This really is one of the highest forms of worship. Through this we acknowledge who God is the source of our life. We desire to know more of who His is and His ways, which is an act of worship.
- We can then continue to worship by responding to, and acting upon, His word in any of the following ways.
 - Allowing Him to use us as vessels to bring His Kingdom to other people – by praying for them, laying hands on them and allowing the Gifts of the Spirit to flow.
 - Also, this time may just be a time of thanksgiving for what God has done through the service already because through the service He has already met our need.
 - Leaving the gathering renewed, refreshed and inspired to continue to worship our God in every aspect of our daily lives - 24 hours a day, every day.

Again, the above is an example and a point of reference. It is not absolute. It gives a general order. However, it is open to allow the Holy Spirit to flow in any way He desires at any moment during the gathering. It does not limit Him to just the “music times.” The above encompasses the whole time of gathering. We must remember that we are to think of the entire time of gathering, as a whole and collectively as the worship experience - which has many different aspects to it.

Our worship, as we said earlier, should be flowing and leading us to the aspects and attributes of God’s heart. I liken it to be as a “river” flowing from out of a mountain. There are different currents, sometimes fast, sometimes calm and smooth. As you flow down this “river” there are many different offshoots of streams, but we must stay on the main river in order to flow and enter into that vast ocean at the end of our river. If we get caught and go off into one of the side streams we may end up at a “dead end” of marshlands, swamps or dried up old ponds of nothingness. Our desire should be to flow and follow the “current” of the “river” of the Holy Spirit so that we end up in the very presence and vastness (awesomeness) of the Living God, who is never dry or mucky. Rather, His presence is fresh and can quench the thirsting of our souls. In other words, our worship should lead us somewhere and as leaders we must be sensitive to the “current” or flow of the Holy Spirit at that particular gathering, small group or event so that we can experience the fullness of God. Every gathering, small group or event should be looked at differently in the sense that the “current” of the Holy Spirit may be flowing differently from what happened the last time we gathered. He may take us on a different river” to get us to experience another attribute of the fullness of God. When you look at a map of the world, there are rivers that flow into the different oceans of the world. You can also see that all the oceans are really all “tied” together. They may have different names; however they all make up one body of water surrounding the earth. As the oceans of the world flow together making one large body of water, so it is with God. The oceans have different names but are still part of one large body of water. So it is with God. He is one God, who has many characteristics. If we take a particular “river” it will take us to one of the characteristics of God. At any given gathering, small group, or event the Holy Spirit might want to carry us onto the river that leads us to experience a different attribute of God. However, remember we are still experiencing God and who He is.

Therefore, the songs that we choose or other expressions of worship should be connected and going in the same direction as the Holy Spirit wants us to go. This is where praying and seeking the Holy Spirit becomes a large factor. We need to spend time in prayer to find out what the Holy Spirit wants to do and where He wants to take us for each service or event. Then we can choose songs or other expressions that are appropriate and will help us to go in the right direction to get to the goal – which is experiencing God.

As a Worship Leader, you should desire and be expecting to meet “face to face” with God and enter into the “Secret Place” every time you gather to worship. You must also realize that it will not be the same as the previous time of worship. God is unlimited. Do not limit this present experience based on past experiences. Do not try to recreate what happened in past times and experiences. Be led by the Holy Spirit, not your own emotions or the emotions of the people you are leading into worship. Do not allow the emotions of the group to dictate what you are doing. However, if we listen to the Holy Spirit, He will show us what aspect of worship is needed to meet and fulfill the worship needs of the members of your group and most importantly, God. As the spirit inside of you desires to seek and know God, the Holy Spirit within will lead you. He will be that “Lamp unto your feet and Light unto your path” that will lead you into that, “secret place where the Most High dwells.” Remember, the Most High dwells in the midst of the worship of His people. As you take hold of these concepts, He will use you, as the Worship Leader, to help “birth” and lead others into that “face-to-face” encounter between God and His people.