

# Connecting with God Called to Worship

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We recently completed a series of messages entitled, “Impossible Dreams.” Is it an impossible dream to believe that we can make a difference in the world? It is impossible if we try to impact the world in our own strength. However, if we join with God in what he is doing to redeem and restore a broken world, then the impossible becomes possible. “With God all things are possible.” Many of us have committed to do at least one thing before Thanksgiving to make a difference for the kingdom of God. As we see the vastness of the needs in the world, it will be easy to get overwhelmed and burned out. It is imperative that we stay connected with God and allow his spirit to work through us. In this series of messages we are looking at ways to stay connected with God. We have looked at prayer and communion. This morning we will look at how worship connects us with God.

## **Psalm 147:1-11**

Praise the LORD.

How good it is to sing praises to our God,  
how pleasant and fitting to praise him!

<sup>2</sup>The LORD builds up Jerusalem;  
he gathers the exiles of Israel.

<sup>3</sup>He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.

<sup>4</sup>He determines the number of the stars  
and calls them each by name.

<sup>5</sup>Great is our Lord and mighty in power;  
his understanding has no limit.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD sustains the humble  
but casts the wicked to the ground.

<sup>7</sup>Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;  
make music to our God on the harp.

<sup>8</sup>He covers the sky with clouds;  
he supplies the earth with rain  
and makes grass grow on the hills.

<sup>9</sup>He provides food for the cattle  
and for the young ravens when they call.

<sup>10</sup>His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his delight in the legs of a man;

<sup>11</sup>the LORD delights in those who fear him,  
who put their hope in his unfailing love.

When I attended seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, the apartment I lived in was located about 30 feet from double railroad tracks. The first night I was awakened at 2 am. The entire apartment building was shaking. The noise was deafening. I thought it was a tornado. Then I realized that two trains were passing each other on the double tracks. I thought, "I will never get a good night's sleep in seminary." After about three nights, I never heard the trains again even though they passed several times a day. I was talking on the phone one afternoon and the person I was talking to said, "What's that noise?" "What noise?" "It sounds like an earthquake!" "Oh, that just the trains passing." I did not even notice it.

Things that become familiar we sometimes don't even notice. Since we come to worship fairly often, the things we do in worship can sometimes become so familiar that we don't notice them. They lose their meaning. I am focusing on different aspects of worship and how they help us to connect with God. Today we are going to focus on the experience of worship.

Psalms 147 begins and ends with the same phrase: "Praise the Lord!" In English it is three words. In the original language, Hebrew, it is one word: "Hallelujah." It consists of two parts. The first part of the word is "Hallel" which means "to boast" or "to glory" in something. The question is what do we boast in? What do we glory in? We all glory in something. We all connect with something we believe will give our lives significance. We might connect with our work, or money or our appearance or popularity or success. When we have that thing that we glory in, we feel worthwhile. If we don't have that thing, we feel worthless.

The second part of the word describes what the Psalmist has discovered as the only thing worthy to be the source of our boasting and our glory. The second half of the word is "Jah" which is a shortened form of the word "Yahweh"—the personal name of God. When God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, Moses asked his name. God responded that his name was "Yahweh" which means "he is" or "I am."

When we come to worship, it gives us an opportunity to check the second part of the word in our lives. In worship, we ask the question: “What do I boast in?” What do I dream about? What do I cling to? Is it money, success, credentials? Worship exposes what we glory in. What is it for you? Worship provides a way to pry our fingers off those things that are not worthy of our glory. Worship enables us to focus on God and connect with him as the ultimate source of our glory.

This is a frequent theme in my preaching. I often talk about the idols that we worship. An idol is anything that we need in addition to Jesus Christ for our lives to have worth and meaning. The reason I preach on this so often is because I need to be reminded of it so often. I frequently say, “I preach to myself and just let you listen in.” Clinging to things other than God for my significance is a constant battle for me and for all of us. One of the reasons God gave us the Sabbath is to help us fight this battle. Every seven days we come into God’s presence for a little check up. Where is the source of our glory? It is so easy during the week to attach our glory to something other than God. Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” We need this reminder—often—at least every seven days! It provides us an opportunity to detach from our idols and connect with God who alone is worthy of our glory. The prophet Jeremiah captured the battle in these words:

#### **Jeremiah 9:23-24**

This is what the LORD says:  
"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom  
or the strong man boast of his strength  
or the rich man boast of his riches,  
<sup>24</sup>but let him who boasts boast about this:  
that he understands and knows me,  
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,  
justice and righteousness on earth,  
for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

Worship reminds us of the one who alone is worthy of our worship. The Psalmist says in worship “a song of praise is fitting.” We worship God because it fits. It fits who God is, and

it fits who we are. The word “fitting” is an inadequate translation of the word. The Hebrew word means “beautiful.” Worship means not finding God useful, but finding him beautiful. King David expressed this experience of worship in Psalm 27.

**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.

Sometimes we worship God because he is useful. We need him to do things for us. We ask him for a list of things: a better job, healing from illness or protection when we travel. Sometimes we come to church as an exchange with God. “OK, God I’ll come to church and put some money in the plate. In return I expect you to keep bad things from happening to me this week and for you to bless me.” God becomes a means to an end to get what we want. God wants us to ask him for what is on our hearts. But if that is the extent of our relationship with God, then we are missing out on the real blessing. To find God beautiful is to discover that God himself is the blessing—not the stuff that he provides. It does not fit God when we only find him useful and not beautiful.

You may have a business partner or a partner on a project at school. You don’t like this person, but you make a lot of money together or you make good grades on your projects. So you find a way to work together. It is a useful relationship. You get what you want and your partner gets what he or she wants. The other person is a means to an end.

You may have a friend or spouse or significance person in your life that you love and this person loves you. When you spend time with this person you don’t begin by saying: “What are take aways? What outcomes do you expect from our time together?” Instead you have no agenda. You just enjoy being together. The relationship is an end in itself. At some

point you express what that person means to you. “I love you. I am so glad you are in my life. I love spending time with you even when we are not doing anything.”

Which of those describes your relationship with God? Is he a useful business associate or a lab partner? Are most of our conversations with God about what we need him to do for us? Or do we spend time just enjoying the beauty of God—enjoying him? And letting him enjoy us?

When we choose to enjoy someone because of who they are and not for what they can do for us, everything changes in the relationship. As we live out our Impossible Dreams, we are going to encounter persons who seem different from us. Some of them will be homeless; some of them will be uneducated; some of them will smell bad. We may want to do a good deed for them and then leave as quickly as possible. If we do that, what are we really doing it for? It is possible to use those in need to meet our own need of feeling better about ourselves. We give food to a hungry person, then we have fulfilled our obligation to do one thing to make a difference before Thanksgiving. We can check that box and feel good about ourselves. We have just used that person as a means to an end. There are persons who have a welfare mentality and know how to work the system, and they will use us as a means to an end. But what if we stopped and talked with that person? What if we took time to look into his eyes and really see him as a person—a child of God? The key to making a difference in the world is not necessarily feeding the masses. It is about making a difference for one person by learning to enjoy that person as a human being created in the image of God. We do need to feed the masses and help villages get clean water. But if that is all we do, we are missing out on the deeper blessing of becoming a friend to one person. Some of you are sponsoring Compassion Children or children through Metro Ministries. You write a check each month to help feed, clothe and educate them. That is wonderful. Let me challenge you to go a step farther. Write letters to your child. If possible go meet your child.

Some of our members have gone to New York to meet the kids they sponsor through Metro Ministries. Another member is considering going to Madagascar to meet their Compassion Child. Being with them, writing to them are ways to connect and allow them to become real persons.

When we come to worship it reminds us that life is about relationships. Life is more about “being” than “doing.” When we connect with God and enjoy being with him and allow him to enjoy being with us, that connection spills over. We are able to do that with each other and with someone who seems different from me. When we really get to know that person, we discover that he or she is not so different after all.

How do we make the transfer from seeing God as useful to experiencing him as beautiful? Verses 10 and 11 help us to see the process:

#### **Psalm 147:10-11**

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his delight in the legs of a man;

<sup>11</sup>the LORD delights in those who fear him,  
who put their hope in his unfailing love.

You may be wondering why the Psalmist says that God does not “delight in the legs of a man.” It sounds a little strange! The RSV has a better translation. It says God does not take “pleasure in the speed of a runner.” God does not delight in the strength of a horse or the speed of a runner. This is a description of a powerful army—strong horses pulling chariots and foot soldiers advancing rapidly upon an enemy. It is an image describing human strength. God does not delight in our displays of human strength—what we can do without him. He delights in those who fear him—who humble themselves and admit their need of him. He takes pleasure in those who hope in his unfailing love. Our hope is in God and who he is. Even in the Old Testament God is a God of grace. He offers his love to his children as a gift. The basis of our relationship with God is not our love for him and what we

do for him. The basis of our relationship with God is his love for us and what he has done for us.

When we transfer our hope from our own strength to God's love we experience his beauty. We love him because he first loved us. We realize that he alone is worthy of our worship. He is the only one whose love is unending. Everyone else's love can fail us. Only God can promise us unending love. When we are secure in his love, we are free to risk loving others. Their love may come and go. It will hurt deeply when it goes. But we will not be devastated. Our hope is in God's unending love.

Worship is a time every seven days to do a little check up. Where do we place our hope? To what are we clinging to in order to get our worth and significance? When we come to worship it is a time to behold the beauty of God and remember that the source of life is enjoying him—being with him. How would you describe your relationship with God today? Is he useful or beautiful?