



BIBLEWAY MINISTRIES

MAKING A DIFFERENCE—THE BIBLE WAY



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DEFINING WORSHIP

The bell rang at a small, country church, announcing to the quiet community Sunday morning had come. As the people filed into the sanctuary, Eleanor joined them.

With her silver hair tied neatly in a bun, she made her way slowly but purposefully toward her favorite seat in the church. Though her eyes had dimmed with age, they radiated a profound sense of peace and joy.

Eleanor's life was no stranger to trials and tribulations. She had faced loss, pain and countless hardships. Yet she had not been saddened or discouraged by these circumstances. She gave thanks and honor to the God who had sustained her joy and peace. A smile spread across her face as she prayed. It was a testament to her faith that had weathered the storms of life — and had created within her heart a love for her God!

That is true worship!

Eleanor demonstrated true worship is not merely a ritual; it is a heartfelt response to the overwhelming love and faithfulness of God. This was counter-intuitive, considering the experiences which had shaken her life. Instead of bitterness, she expressed joy; instead of discouragement, she had a sense of calmness. She exemplified William Temple's definition of worship: "To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God" (emphasis added).

True worship is a result of our relationship with God. It is what Henry Blackaby describes as "experiencing the presence of God." The experience of God's presence creates a desire to worship Him. Whether we know it or not, God is interested in us and desires to make Himself known to us. In Luke 11:13, Jesus said, "If you then, who are evil,

know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

God wants to be a Friend like no other to us. When we become conscious of His love, we learn it is not temporary or conditional, but everlasting. In showing His grace to Israel in their exile, He said to them, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." (Jeremiah 31:3b) God's love is not performance-driven or based on our worthiness but on His unchanging nature. It is unchanging even when we fail, are made aware of our shortcomings or when embarrassing doubts randomly attack us.

This truth about God's love causes us to delight in Him. Delight is a profound sense of joy and pleasure. It is finding our deepest satisfaction and joy in Him above all else. It's more than just a fleeting emotion; it is a posture of our hearts. The beauty of God is, when we truly delight in Him, our desire aligns with His will and we experience the fullness of His love and grace in our lives. This motivates our worship, which is God's ultimate purpose for us.

Eleanor's worship was not just an act; it was the embodiment of a life which had experienced the love and presence of God. Her devotion stemmed from a profound experience of God's grace. Her relationship with God fueled her worship and filled her heart with an indescribable joy.

As we remember Eleanor's example, may her story motivate us to develop a deeper relationship with God allowing our worship to flow naturally from the fullness of His love and grace in our lives.

- Dr. L.W. Edwards

Keeping It Real: Picture-Perfect Worship

We're sorry, you've been disqualified.

Recently, a talented photographer had to forfeit a photo contest because the picture he submitted wasn't fake. What is the world coming to? When 1839 Awards added an AI (artificial intelligence) category to its annual contest for Color Photography, Miles Astray wanted to prove nature can beat machines. So he submitted his unique flamingo photograph pictured here in the contest.



Viewers gave the photo the People's Vote Award and judges awarded it third place — until they discovered it wasn't an AI-generated image. The judges then disqualified Astray's entry, stating it "did not meet the requirements for the AI-generated image category." Apparently, the authentic photo didn't look fake enough, proving Astray's point.

Technologies such as AI make it difficult, even for professionals, to know the difference between what is real and what is really fake. In spiritual matters such as worship, sometimes we need an impartial, all-knowing Judge to help us discern between the authentic and the artificial.

Is Your Worship Real or Really Fake?

When you think of worship, what snapshot comes to mind? Maybe it's a church setting with dimmed lights and somber music. People slowly swaying back and forth with uplifted hands. The writer of Psalm 95 described worship as singing to the Lord, making a joyful noise, coming before His presence with thanksgiving and bowing down before Him. All of these actions can be real portrayals of worship. But are they authentic?

Artificial Worship

Here's how the Judge (God) evaluated exiled Israel's photo entry in the Worship category. Through the prophet Isaiah, He said, "This peo-

ple draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men." (Isaiah 29:13) They said the right things to God and sounded convincing. But their hearts were miles away. They had enough respect for God to follow the rules and attend synagogue on Saturday, but not enough to want to live for Him on Sunday. They were going through the motions. Consequently, their worship had become hollow. Shallow. Plastic. Artificial. And God saw straight through it.

The Heart of Worship

Our negatives were developed in the same dark-room. Like Israel, we fall short in offering God the worship He deserves because we often allow a thousand lesser gods (idols) to captivate our hearts. Our idols create miles of distance between us and God, draining our worship of its essence. They then begin to change it into something else. Something artificial.

Our personal ambitions, wealth, jobs, families, plans for the future, the opinions of others, the world's admiration and respect, our health, our political leanings and our cultural heritage can be good things that have their place. But God wants to be first: Above all. We must give praise to Him from whom all blessings flow.

When this happens, we connect with God's heart, for He has all of our hearts.

Ask God to search your heart and reveal the quality of your worship. Be open to His probing, yet loving, finger on your soul. Surrender anything that is taking His first-place position, as well as any idols to which you are clinging. Run back into His arms and worship Him with renewed authenticity today.

- Cameron T. Edwards

