

The Vision Explained

Written by:

Tom and Lisa Long

From the creation of mankind God intended and desired communion with them. Relationship was at the core of His heart. In the beginning there was perfect communion. Experiencing God's manifest presence was not something humanity had to work toward it was just a natural part of their existence. Then it came, God's beloved questioned the goodness of His heart. Lured by thoughts of entitlement, perhaps an incessant need to know, whatever your take on why this single act would hurl mankind from His presence casting humanity into a place where sin dwells. God in His holiness could not dwell with them in this condition. His love for them is unchanged and He immediately begins the process toward redemption. The first thing God does in this situation with Adam and Eve was to fashion garments for them. Made out of animal skin. It is noteworthy that animals had to die for this first covering of sin. Although not explicitly written in Scripture it is certainly implied in Genesis 3:21. This is the first time we see animals shedding blood for a covering of sin in Scripture. Adam and Eve appear to have an understanding from here on that blood must be shed to cover sin.

From the moment of their fall God moved toward the redemption of His creation through Jesus. He was unwilling to be parted from them while the earth awaited the Savior. So God provided a temporary way by which His beloved mankind could come into His presence again. It is here that God institutes animal sacrifice. In Exodus 25, God lays out His first post-fall plan of worship by which His people can come into His presence. This is the first account of God telling man how He wants to be worshipped – His blueprint if you will. Perhaps lacking the original intimacy, at least the Lord and His beloved could experience a measure of intimacy until the final restoration of this relationship could be made possible through the blood sacrifice of Jesus. It is important to note here that as this temporary plan is practiced we begin to learn in greater detail God's desire for worship. In Genesis 4 we learn from the story of Cain and Abel that God is not pleased by just any worship; in fact not all worship is acceptable to God. While there is room for debate about what exactly was unacceptable about Cain's worship, one thing is very clear. His worship was unacceptable to God. It is certainly implied in this passage that Cain knew what was right and yet he choose to worship in his own way. God was not pleased by that.

While God has often used change to speak to His children, He himself is unchanging. This is why we believe that God's blueprint for how He wants to be worshipped is still relevant. In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus tells us that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. With the sacrifice of Jesus mankind no longer needs to sacrifice animals or rely on priests for access to God's presence. Since Jesus' sacrifice made it possible for the Holy Spirit to come believers have a measure of God's presence living inside of them. We believe in this way that Jesus did not abolish the way in which God wants to be worshipped. He fulfilled it.

In order to fully understand how God wants to be worshipped, we must go back to the original blueprint, the Tabernacle, and catch God's intended purpose for each action. Step back in time with me as we take a closer look. One thing I find interesting about the original plan that is typically not a part of how we worship today is that they "entered the gates with thanksgiving" or with their offerings. Upon entering the gate they would find themselves standing before an altar. Upon this altar they offered their offerings to God. This might have been a praise offering or perhaps it was a sin offering. It might even have been an offering that symbolized a blessing to God. Whatever the type of "Burnt

Offering” this was their time to lift up their praise to God. I would imagine you could hear the sound of people rejoicing about how God had brought them out of Egypt and out of slavery. You might hear them recounting the experience of watching the Red Sea split in two as they walked across on dry ground. I like to refer to the outer court as the Court of Praise.

Following their time of praise at the Altar of Burnt Offerings, they then cleansed themselves at the Bronze Laver. God instructed them that they must be clean before they enter His Inner Court in Exodus 30:19-21. In fact, He tells them that they will die if they enter in without first cleansing themselves. Once they had washed their hands and feet, they entered into the Inner Court or Holy Place. Here they ate of the bread at the Table of Showbread. An interesting thing I learned while in Israel was that in Hebrew custom, it was counted an honor for someone to invite you to eat with him. It is their way of saying to you, “I want to know you better and I want you to know me better.” So for God to invite His people to eat at His table they would have understood him to be saying to them, “I want our relationship to deepen.”

From there they were instructed to trim the wicks on the Golden Lampstand. Just as they trimmed their wicks in order to produce the maximum amount of light possible, God continually trims us giving us the ability to shine brighter in the dark places. From there they would offer a “sweet aroma” to God at the Altar of Burnt Offerings. And once a year, they entered into the Holy of Holies where God’s presence was and where God said to them, “I will meet you and I will speak with you.” (Exodus 25:22) Upon Jesus’ blood sacrifice believers were all, without bias, permitted unlimited accesses to the Holy of Holies. It is here that we believe we may have thrown the baby out with the bath water.

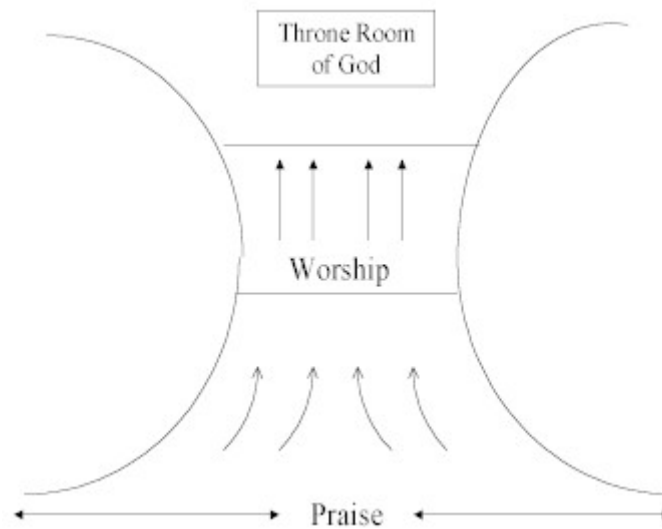
In other words, we have come to believe that since Jesus gave us absolute access to God on a personal and intimate level that we no longer have any use for the prior process for worshipping Him. However, we believe that Jesus did not abolish His Father’s plan for worship – He fulfilled it. With the sacrifice of our Savior some of the aspects of this plan changed, i.e. our Burnt Offerings no longer must be blood sacrifices because Jesus was the final blood sacrifice for all mankind forever. What we bring to God at this place in His plan is now a different type of “Burnt Offering” it is a sacrificial offering of the heart that may have material or literal form. It is also the place where we repeat our desire for Jesus to cover our sins.

Perhaps you are wondering how God's original plan for worship practically fits into corporate worship settings today. Before I answer that question let me give you some important information about Praise & Worship and share with you this vision that God has given us. As a worship leader, one thing I have noticed is how interchangeably we tend to use the slogan “Praise and Worship”. I sometimes question if we truly understand the meanings of these words. They are two totally different words with two separate meanings. If we trace the Hebrew and Greek words for *praise*, we see such words as *halah*, *shabach* and *tehillah*. All these words denote a sense of celebrating or boasting about someone or something. They are merely a way by which we can boast **to one another about** the awesomeness of our God as well as to God. The basic concept here is that we are bragging about God and even to God about Himself. At the same time, we can trace the word worship and find words like *shachah* and *proskuneo* which

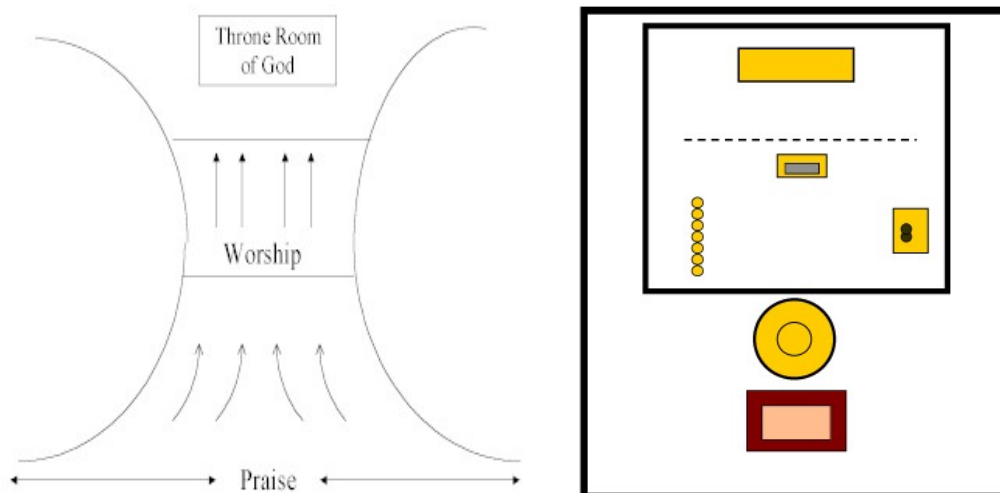
simply means to prostrate or bow down in reverence before someone. This is **directly to the one being worshipped**. This separates itself from praise by the depth and intimacy of the glory given to God. For an example we may more readily understand, it's like the difference between bragging on or praising my wife in public to other people and/or in front of other people verses what I say to her privately and more intimately. Worship is where we as individuals *and* as a corporate body get private and more intimate with God.

Praise – Worship. They mean two different things, yet we use them interchangeably. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well and told her that “the Father is seeking them that would worship (*proskuneo*) Him,” should we take Him in a literal sense or believe that it is spiritual symbolism? I have seen in Scripture that God wants those who would lavish Him with worship. He is looking for “priests” – those who will press in to Him for the purpose of ministering to Him. God wants us to go one-on-one with Him. He wants us to turn our focus vertical and press into His presence. He wants intimacy.

Here is a diagram of the Vision God gave me in 1995 shortly after my wife and I were ordained into the ministry and at a time when I was desperately seeking God’s heart for and trying to understand what He wanted from “Praise and Worship”.



If we take a diagram of the Vision and lay it over the diagram of the Tabernacle, we will understand what God wants from us today.



We may tend to view God's original blueprint as a "ritualistic" Old Testament thing. But I believe that it is here where God gave us a blueprint for how He wants to be worshipped that is still relevant today. Let me draw your attention to something. Where was God in the Tabernacle? He was above the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. His glory was throughout but his presence, His being if you will, was in the innermost sanctuary.

This is where I believe we may tend to miss it today. Perhaps we have the praise thing down. We dance. We shout. We clap. We know how to lift up a "praise offering" for all the mighty things He has done. And typically speaking, we move toward a type of worship of God by singing some slower songs that speak more directly to God and tell Him we love and adore Him. Typically, I see us stop here. We tend to turn our focus back on to ourselves at this point. It is as though we start to enter into a place of intimacy then turn and walk back out. I was at a church not too long ago where towards the end of the "praise & worship service" we were pressing into pure worship when all of the sudden the Pastor jumped up and encouraged us to lay hands on each other and pray for each other's illnesses and problems. It was just then I felt that I could hear God crying out, "Wait! We're not finished here." I so longed to experience worship untainted, unburdened by our stuff. I wanted us to enter God's presence for the sake of pure relationship building, expressing our hearts for Him. My own heart ached for that place. I know that God wants to help us with our issues. I know that He wants us to communicate those things to Him. He certainly cares. But to me this didn't seem like the time and place for that. This seemed like a holier place, a higher place, one that transcended me and my problems or my neighbor and his. I was frustrated. We almost got there. Since then I've experienced that many times in a corporate setting. The overwhelming question in my heart is how do we move beyond that place?

Imagine this. We come together as one Body. Our goal is seeking the presence of God. We manage to get seated at the feet of our King. We have not come burdened. We have left at the outer gate those things that distract us. We are here to exchange love. Without interruption, the man of the hour comes with the message God has given him. Could this be a better way?

I leave you with this. Throughout his journey here on earth, Jesus used the word praise one time. He used the word worship (or a derivative of the word) over 14 times. When He said in John 4:23, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: for the Father is seeking such to worship Him," He was referring to all those who bear the name of Jesus. His focus was on our having an intimate relationship with His Father. This intimacy shapes us. This place of love exchange is where His Bride will be transformed – made ready for His return.