

The Gospel, Worship, Health Evangelism

A Few Introductory Thoughts by Lloyd A. Knecht
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Worship and the Gospel

Worship, who to worship, and how to worship has been a hot button topic in the post-modern age for Christians at large and Seventh-day Adventists as well. Worship is the predominant activity of Scripture, mentioned over 400 times. It is expressed through praise, shouting, raising the hands, clapping, singing, instrument music, dancing, standing, prostration and more. It is not just an exercise of the intellect. It involves the whole being. It is a predominant activity of the angels who are ministering spirits, with joy doing God's bidding as a worship response to His mighty acts of creation and grace. The focus of worship is on God, not the pastor, the worship leaders, or the congregation. There is a movement of prominent Bible scholars to recover our Hebrew heritage including worship. Having been involved in the development of Adventist Messianic outreach to our Jewish friends, I can testify to the joyful worship and close fellowship experienced in Hebrew worship.

We believe that the Gospel, the Good News of God in Christ is the foundation of all true worship. The recurring themes of creation and redemption permeate scripture. The worship service is an opportunity to give a blessing of gratitude to God for our creation, redemption, communion, transformation, and assurance of eternal life in Christ.

Knowing God's character of Agape is theological truth. This will be our study for eternity. But a correct *theory* of God, of truth, of doctrine alone is insufficient. We need to daily experience God. Learning to know our Lord intimately day by day is what He longs for (John 17:3).

Worship Through Experiencing God

There is a hunger, in western society especially, to have an encounter with God. We want to experience God. We need to know that He is immanent in our lives. The Bible is written to reveal God's interaction with His people and His people with Him. This was a driving force of the reformation. Luther spent three hours a day in prayer, study, and meditation – experiencing God. Wesley's class meetings and group interactions largely drove Methodism's spirituality and growth.

In general, the descendants of Luther, Wesley, (Protestantism including Adventism) have neglected and lost in large measure the “spiritual life”, an absence of the divine. This has resulted in a famine of “experiencing God” resulting in a deep soul hunger of which we may even be unconscious. A double hunger of man for God, and of God for man. John Dybdahl describes four main factors that have contributed to this loss, and deprived millions of Christians of a meaningful spiritual life.

The first results from the way we have defined religion as accepting certain ideas with the mind...We traditionally use statements of belief to explain our brand of religion...As theology students soon learn, these confessions are not acknowledgements of sin, but statements of doctrinal orthodoxy...primarily cognitive and intellectual.

The problem becomes even clearer as we look at the second reason for the hunger. The very definition of theology accepted by Christians militates against taking the devotional life seriously. Traditionallly, many in the church spoke in the plural about theology...dogmatic or doctrinal...Second, moral theology concerned with ethics...The third, mystical or devotional theology focused on the spiritual life...

The third reason for the spiritual hunger follows naturally. Because of the preceding deeply ingrained understandings of religion and theology, those responsible for teaching Christianity at the highest levels have often

neglected the spiritual life. Based on a survey in 1994 by the Murdoch Trust of more than 800 people, the importance placed on spirituality and the spiritual life of a pastor varies greatly between laypeople, pastors, and seminary professors. Laypeople list spirituality as the number one priority in a perfect pastor. Pastors rate it number four. Seminary professors do not even rate spirituality as in the top five priorities for pastoral training. Their most important item is theological knowledge.

I am a product of this system...finally graduating with a PhD. I do not regret that education. In all that time, (years of theological education) I never had one class devoted specifically to instruction and training in the spiritual life...My teachers were good people, and I believe they thought that I would "catch" the devotional life on my own."

The fourth and final reason for the hunger relates to the selective way we have understood and followed our important religious founders. Charismatically gifted founders of religious reforms or movements typically are wholistic in their approach (Luther, Wesley, etc.)... The original wholistic view of religion faded away...I have seen a similar thing happen in the Seventh-day Adventist Church with Ellen G. White, founder and prophet. A complete religious reformer, she took a prominent role in the doctrinal reform...

An examination of the scholarly work on her writings will reveal that after her death Adventists have studied her mostly for what she had to say about doctrinal belief and Christian lifestyle. *Satisfying the Hunger of Your Soul*, 2007 John Dybdahl pp. 13-15

Some of us can relate to his experience. God wants to experience us. He longs for us to experience Him in every detail of life. "This is life eternal, that they may know You, the only true God," the Savior prayed, "and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). He prayed that we might

be one as He and the Father are one in intimate fellowship (vs. 21) . The word *know* in John 17:3 is from the same root translated from Hebrew to Greek in the Septuagint in Genesis 4:1, "And Adam *knew* his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." The most intimate wholistic relationship we can experience. If this is missing in our relationship with God in Christ all religious practices are meaningless.

Worship as Thanksgiving and Praise for His Mighty Acts

Join me in the joy of adoration, praise and intimate fellowship alluded to in John, chapter seven. Jerusalem and its surrounding villages were crowded with Jews from all over the Roman Empire. This was the last day of Israel's greatest feast or festival. *Sukkot*, "Feast of Booths" (Feast of Tabernacles John 7:2) or "Feast of Ingathering" from the 15th to 21st of Tiishri, the seventh month (September/October). They were celebrating God's protection during Israel's forty years of wilderness sojourn. and God's banner of love and forgiveness, his booth of fire and cloud which still watched over them in the land of promise. The fall harvest was complete, the "Festival of Trumpets" with it's ten day solemn insistent call to repentance ending in the "fast" the day of judgment/atonement, *Yom Kippur*, had ended They were sealed for another year.

Almost immediately "sukkot" began, seven days of living in booths, on the roofs of the dwellings, in the courtyards, streets, squares and gardens of Jerusalem and the surrounding villages.

This festival had messianic and eschatological meanings. Its themes and motifs permeate the gospels, revealing what Christ (Messiah) has already done for us in His incarnation, and in Revelation, what He will do for us in the final restoration of all things. Then, the family of heaven and

earth are at last one in love, joy, peace, and holiness in a greater “Land of Promise.”

The Water of life

On this last day of the feast the daily ritual was performed as usual. While waiting for the morning sacrifice to be prepared, a special procession was being organized for the water-drawing ceremony. Led by a priest carrying a golden pitcher, the worshippers began at the temple. Liturgical flutists enhanced the joyful emotions of the people with their cheerful music. Arriving at the pool of Siloam, the priest filled the golden pitcher with water and returned to the temple through the water gate (named after this ceremony). Some rabbis gave special eschatological significance to this gate because they identified it with the south gate of Ezekiel's Temple (Ezekiel 47:1-5).

The procession arrived back at the Temple just in time for the morning sacrifice on the altar of burnt-offering. A threefold blast of the trumpets welcomed them as another priest carrying the wine for the drink-offering joined the first priest. The two priests ascended the steps to the altar, placing two beautiful silver basins on the southwest corner of the altar. Each basin had a hole so that when the wine and water were poured into its specific basin, the wine and the water would run down to the base of the altar typifying the redeeming blood and water from Jesus' pierced side.

At the moment the priest began pouring the water and wine into the basins, the temple music began. The people chanted, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). Then the “Great Hallel” (Psalms 113-118) was chanted antiphonally accompanied by

flutes. Edersheim explained, "As the Levites intoned the first line of praise of Psalm 113 the people repeated it; while to each of the other lines they responded by Hallelu Yah (praise ye the Lord). But in Psalms 118 the people not only repeated the first line, 'O give thanks to the Lord,' but also 'O then, work now salvation, Jehovah" (Psalms 118:25), ' Lord send now prosperity' (Psalms 118:25); and again at the close of the Psalm, 'O give thanks to the Lord.' As they repeated these lines, they shook toward the altar the *Lulavs* (palm branches) which they held in their hands – as if with this token of the past to express the reality and cause of their praise, and to remind God of His promises." Alfred Edersheim *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services* (London, 1984), p. 241

The morning service closed with a procession of priests marching around the altar chanting "O then, work now salvation, Jehovah! O Jehovah, send now prosperity! (Psalms 118:25) On the seventh and last day of the feast they marched around the altar seven times chanting the Psalm and shouting *Hosheana*, (save now). Called the Great Hosannah.

After the water pouring ceremony and the chanting of the people for the Lord to send salvation, Jesus cried aloud, His voice echoing throughout the temple and beyond, "If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water (John 7:38; Isaiah 55:1-5)

During the feast there was much disputing whether Y'shua (Jesus) was the Messiah or not. And the authorities had sought to arrest Him for His claim to be regarded as the fulfillment of all, and the true Messiah! But now, Edersheim pointedly observes, There is "no command or violence of threat in His proclamation. It is the King, meek, gentle, and loving; the Messiah, Who will not break the bruised reed, Who will not lift up His voice

in tone of anger, but speaks in accents of loving condescending compassion, Who now bids, whoever thirsts, come unto Him and drink. And so the words to all time remained the call of Christ to all that thirst" (see Edersheim above).

Ellen White also directs our hearts to the connection of the water pouring ceremony and Christ's call to our hearts, and the heart of the world to partake of Him, the living water. "The priest had that morning performed the ceremony which commemorated the smiting of the rock in the wilderness. That rock was a symbol of Him who by His death would cause living streams of salvation to flow to all who are athirst...

"The cry of Christ to the thirsty soul is still going forth, and it appeals to us with even greater power than to those who heard it in the temple on the last day of the feast. The fountain is open for all...Jesus is still crying, "If any man thirst, let Him come unto me and drink" (*Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White, p. 454).

At the festival, Jesus proclaims Himself the Messiah, Savior of the world, the divine-human King of the Universe. This calls forth an anthem of praise and thanksgiving in worship, a heart appreciation of His infinite gift that transforms the most degraded life. His cry of love not only summons us to prostrate ourselves before Him in worship. The cry of Jesus includes the promise that drinking of His life opens the floodgates within our hearts and unleashes a torrent of living water that will satisfy other thirsty souls. Worship is more than a grandiose feeling and celebration of thanksgiving, praise, love, peace, and joy. Worship is also a Spirit impelled aggressive ministry of love to the sick, needy, and those oppressed by sin. He is the supreme exemplar of worship through ministry. The original health evangelist.

Light of the World

The second major ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles or booths was the nightly illumination of the Temple. The Mishna graphically describes the ceremony. "There were there (in the court of the women) golden candlesticks (lampstands) with four golden bowls on the top of them and four ladders to each candle stick., and four youths of the priestly stock and in their hands jars of oil holding a hundred and twenty logs which they poured into the bowls. They made wicks from the worn out drawers and girdles of the priests and with them they set the candlesticks alight. There was not a court yard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the Beth ha-Sheubah (court of the women)." Mishna, *Sukkah*, 5, 4

Once through the gate with a multitude of worshippers, the priests turned their faces toward the west and chanted this ancient prayer "Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their backs toward the Temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east, but, as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord" (Ezekiel 8:16).

The light shining from the court of the women in the temple illumed the darkness of Jerusalem, a symbol of the Shekinah (God's glory) above the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy place in the temple, and the pillar of fire at night that illumined the whole camp of Israel. It also was a prophecy of Messiah, "The people who walk in darkness have seen a *great light*. Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined (Isaiah 9:2). The festivities of joy thanksgiving and praise lasted all night with singing and playing of harps, cymbals, and trumpets.

Water and light reveal two graphic symbols of Jesus. He is the living water. He is the light of the world, "That was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world (John 1:9). "You are the light of the world," Jesus proclaimed (Matthew 5:14-16). His eternal light breaks forth upon and through each receptive heart, drawing the outcast, sin oppressed, sick, discouraged, failing, or rebellious into the floodlight of Christ's saving grace. Is true worship a spectator event or is it an encounter with God, a *receiving* and *giving*? Paul answers from the depth of his own experience in writing to the believers at Rome, "I am a debtor both to Greeks and barbarians, both to wise and unwise (Romans 1:14).

Worship Through Health Evangelism

Jesus illumined true Sabbath worship at the temple with personal ministry to the sick and oppressed. He tells Isaiah that true worship does not take place in Sabbath services or prayer meeting alone. He puts His finger directly on the problem of His professed people. "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of the Lord. They ask of me the ordinance of justice (correct theology?). They take delight in approaching God."

He declares that ritual liturgical worship, regardless of style, is worse than useless unless His people "loose the bonds of wickedness...undo the heavy burdens...let the oppressed go free and...break every yoke. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out (bank foreclosure); when you see the naked that you cover him, and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh."

He continues to identify true worship and the rich blessings that follow, "Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought" He goes on to identify these as "Repairers of the breach... If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord, honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words. Then shall you delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth. (read all of Isaiah 58).

In our corrupted nature, it's so natural to associate with those who are like us, who believe as we believe; those on our socio-economic level. Our little circle is so comfortable. And we are busy taking care of our seemingly growing personal needs and desires that we just don't have time or energy to be personally concerned or involved with people who don't have it all together. Yes, society (and the church) is so fragmented that we don't know what others are experiencing. Some just fall through the cracks. Few seem to notice – or care. After all. Isn't that what the government is for? We pay our taxes.

We need community- a counter culture of grace. Studies have demonstrated that most people who join the church because of its rock solid biblical doctrines quickly leave the church unless they are nurtured through personal caring, fellowship, and/or church responsibilities involving six or more relationships. Ellen White wrote that if we were more kind and loving, there would be one hundred conversions where now there is one.

God forbid that we worship like ancient Israel. God lamented to Ezekiel, "So they come to you as people do. They sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words but do not do them" (Ezekiel 33:31, 32).

Jennifer, an Adventist social worker, tells of an experience she had as an intern that zeros in on what God will enable each of us to do in revealing the power of the gospel to save and heal damaged men and women in our own expanded circle of influence. In Jennifer's own words:

During my internship he (Bryan) lumbered into my office, fortyish, towering and handsome. Extending a massive hand, he boomed a basso profundo greeting, smiled a bright melting smile, sat down, and proceeded to cry like a small child, tears coursing down his cheeks and dotting his blue work shirt.

"I'm just so...depressed...I've...been this way for a long time and I don't know how to shake it, he sobbed.

The story tumbled out easily: Bryan was an ex-cop, a tough guy who had sustained work related disabilities that pushed him into early retirement. His marriage, also to a law enforcement official, but ended bitterly and left him to raise two teenage children. The disabilities, the divorce and the struggles of parenting weren't his "pressing problem" however. A deeper wound festered. He had cheated on his girlfriend with the woman he ultimately married and fathered two children. The souring of that relationship and the increasing calamities of his life seemed to validate his core belief. He was unforgivable.

"I pray every night, Bryan gasped, "But I just can't seem to earn God's forgiveness."

There it was – five hundred years after the Protestant reformation, in spite of countless televised sermons preached on unmerited grace, at least a few of which I'm sure he heard – the drive to deserve. His words validated my premise that human beings possess an innate urge to justify themselves, an urge that transcends culture, training, education, and era. The instinct persists, appearing and reappearing, bubbling up like pond mud when stirred, a core belief bequeathed to us in our fallen condition.

"So, you're trying to earn God's forgiveness?" I asked.

"Yes, and I just can't." Bryan cried.

"Would you be interested in learning what the Bible says about this?"

"Yes." Bryan looked straight at me, bright blue eyes rimmed red.

I said, "The Bible says you can't earn God's forgiveness. No one can. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace." Grace is unmerited favor, Bryan. If you earned it, it wouldn't be grace anymore. Forgiveness is to give *before*, to release from debt. You sinned in cheating on your girlfriend, you caused her pain and brought consequences into your lives. Yes, but God is in the business of forgiving. Your part is to confess the sin and receive God's forgiveness. The promise is, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'"

It was a kindergarten-simple sermon, but his soft, fertile heart received the seed gladly. Bryan "got it". Depression lifted like morning fog. After only eight sessions, he felt ready to end counseling. He said, "I've been coming to this clinic for fifteen years, and not one of the many counselors I've seen has been able to help me with my depression. I come to you, a lowly intern, and in two months I feel happier than I have for years."

That is Health Evangelism. Layman or professional. It's making friends for God through wholistic ministry to the ignorant, rebellious, wounded –

physically, socially, mentally, psychologically, spiritually. Ellen White provides the key for worship in “medical” ministry, “Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them follow me” (EGW, Ministry of Healing p. 143). He spent more time in teaching and healing than in preaching. He ministered to the whole person whatever the need. His life empowered His word.

We are so professional. So specialized. So busy. Who has the time? Jesus was the Creator and sustainer of the universe, yet he laid it all aside, became us to show us how to worship through personal ministry. Society today has specialized in law, medicine, the ministry, etc. Praise God for the professional and the specialist. When I had my stroke and two minor heart attacks, I thanked God for the professionals, but I also became more informed and practiced more diligently God's lifestyle for to expand my service, and it has.

Those of us who are not health professionals can't by law diagnose or treat the diseases of body, mind, or soul, but we can provide information that will enable people to make life saving, soul saving changes because we care for and love them. Assurance of salvation gives security, conviction, and hope. This is a taste of eternity. But what of the multitudes (or my neighbor) who have never met Jesus, who don't subscribe to Dish network or Direct TV.

As wonderful and effective as Hope TV, 3ABN, and a multitude of other media are, most people have never tuned in. It is so appealing to depend on media, the evangelist, institutions, and great programs to finish the work of carrying the gospel message to every creature. Praise God for them all! Jesus told His disciples that “This gospel of the kingdom will be

preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

This reminds me of the little girl who was afraid of the dark, especially on this stormy night. She came into mommy and daddy's bedroom fearful and agitated. They told her that Jesus and the angels loved her and would watch over her. "But," she replied, "I need someone with skin on 'em."

For weeks I pleaded for God to expand ministry opportunities - to be more personally involved in reaching every creature - to expand my circle of influence for Jesus. I'm attending the Gateway church on Sunday. I joined a men's Bible study fellowship, a "grow group" to establish more personal relationships with other believers. To find greater opportunities for service. Some of the men have been blessed in this group for more than eight years. I'm thinking of joining the Rotary to reach the un-churched as well with the three angel's messages

As an Elder who preaches and teaches a SS class once or twice a month, active in the church's community health/spiritual outreach as part of the Gospel Study Group two weekends a year, , a family, a home, a garden, etc., time is at a premium. I have a choice. It's a question of priority. I pray continually that God will give me the heart of Jesus

The servant of the Lord tells us that the work will not be finished until laymen unite with the ministry in reaching the multitudes who are looking wistfully toward heaven for health and healing. It is so easy to depend on institutions and programs, as valuable as they are. Whether ministers, professors, business persons, physicians, or whomever there is a *personal* work to be done. How can we meet this challenge?

