

INTRODUCTION

I have a light here, but it's not doing what it was created to do. It's not shining. The reason it isn't fulfilling its purpose for existence is because it isn't plugged in to a source of power. I've got a power strip here—and I think I can fix the problem. I'll plug the light into the power strip and then plug the power strip into the power strip. Hmm. I guess that's the problem. Some people are trying to plug in to themselves, and it's not working! But when I plug the light into this extension cord, which is plugged into a source of invisible power that is generated a long way from here an amazing thing happens. Energy surges into the light bulb and—voilà! There is light.

You may be like this light. You realize you don't have much power in your life—power to love, power to live, power to forgive, will-power. And you may think all the resources you need are hidden somewhere deep inside you. Instead, you need to realize there is a source of power available to you that is generated far away from here and in a way you don't understand. It's the supernatural power of the Almighty God, and that power is available to you!

During the past month, we have been talking about the importance of getting plugged in to the very best God has for you this year. These messages are taken from the wonderful Old Testament Book of Ezra. 2,500 years ago, when God's people returned to Jerusalem after almost a century of being exiled in Babylon, they found their city in ruins. The Temple of God—where they believed God lived—had been destroyed. This is a story of how God's people plugged in to His supernatural power.

These messages have simply followed exactly what happened in Ezra 3. The first thing they did was to gather together to study God's Word. You need to be plugged in to a small group Bible study. Next they gave God several offerings. Last week we talked about how you'll never experience God's best until you plug in to His plan of bringing the Lord's tithe to the Lord's house on the Lord's day to support the Lord's work.

When we come to verse 10, we discover there was a final important activity that allowed them to plug in to God's best. They decided to rebuild the Temple, so they gathered for a ground-breaking worship service. In our minds, let's go back in time and try to see, hear, and experience what happened at that worship service:

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord as prescribed by David, king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

If you want to plug in to God’s best for you in 2003, you must make a commitment to *worship*—to celebrate God’s goodness. I didn’t say make a commitment to *attend* worship—but a commitment to *really* worship God. Worship not only honors God, it will refresh your life and be a blessing to others.

When people around America hear the miraculous story of what God is doing in Green Acres, they often want to ask me questions about our church. One question I’m always asked is: What worship style do you use? I know what they mean. They want to add a man-made adjective in front of the word worship. They want to know if we use contemporary worship; or blended worship; or traditional worship; or casual worship; or charismatic worship; or liturgical worship.

I don’t like those adjectives, because they are all so relative—even among Baptist churches. Compared to First Baptist Church, Charleston, S.C. where I preached in a robe and the choir sang an anthem in Latin, we are wildly contemporary. But compared to some of the Baptist Gen-X churches in the metroplex, we would be stiffly traditional. I used to employ some of those adjectives myself, but God convicted me about the danger of adding a man-made word to a word that is all about God—worship. So I refuse to use any of those adjectives to describe our worship. If they keep pressing me for an adjective to describe our worship, there is only one adjective I’ll use. Biblical. We are striving for biblical worship. If you aren’t sure what biblical worship is, let me give you four quick characteristics of biblical worship we find in Ezra 3.

1. BIBLICAL WORSHIP: FOLLOWS THE DIRECTIONS OF THE BIBLE

That may sound redundant, but much of what people call biblical worship has more to do with their own traditions than the Bible. Ezra 3:10 says the priests took their trumpets and the Levites grabbed their cymbals and they took their places “as prescribed by David King of Israel.” Why did they use trumpets and cymbals? Because God’s word directs us in Psalm 150 to praise God with the sounding of the trumpet and with the clash of resounding cymbals. Their worship guide was the Bible—we have the same worship guide they had.

According to Psalms, there are two different venues for worship.

WORSHIP TIP: You need BOTH meditative (private) and celebrative (corporate) worship encounters.

Worship is not just for Sunday! We should worship every day of our lives. You should worship God in your daily quiet time. You should worship God in your car. When I jog, I listen to praise music and worship God as I run.

Psalm 34 shows us the importance of both private and group worship. In verse 1, David says, “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips” (private) That means you praise God when you wake up and when you take your shower—it’s living a life of worship. But then in verse 3, we see the invitation to corporate worship—“Oh magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together!” That’s what we do when we gather here.

One of my all time favorite verses is found in Psalm 46:10. We live in a dangerous, noisy world, so God says to us, "in the midst of earth shattering troubles, be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Every time I get alone with God for private worship that's what I try to do. We've had some marvelous experiences of public worship here in this place, but I must confess the sweetest, and highest, and most moving experiences of worship in my life have been when I've been alone with God.

If you aren't worshipping God privately on a regular basis where you get still and listen to His still small voice, chances are you won't be especially tuned in to corporate worship. You'll find yourself more of a worship spectator than a worshiper. Your private worship feeds your corporate worship experience.

2. BIBLICAL WORSHIP: IS EXPRESSING PRAISE TO/ABOUT GOD

Worship is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling you have for God—it is an expression of your adoration or praise to God. Ezra 3:11 says, "with praise and thanksgiving they SANG to the Lord." The words they sang were taken from Psalm 136 "God is good—His love endures forever." By the way, the phrase "his mercy endures forever" is repeated 26 times in that chapter, so be careful when you criticize the composer of any praise song that is repetitive!

Singing is not the only expression of worship, but it is one of the most important. Music is an amazing force. Certain songs carry memories with them. A widow can hear a song she and her husband danced to forty years earlier and it will bring tears to her eyes. Every time I hear Karen Carpenter sing, "Close to You" I'm transported back to the summer of 1970.

I like all kinds of music. But when it comes to church music, I confess I like the oldies best. I prefer the old songs because they put me in a nostalgic comfort zone. They bring back memories to me. For instance, I love the song, "How Great Thou Art." It was sung at the funeral of both my parents, and every time I hear it, I think of them. But is that necessarily good? When I sing "How great thou art" I should be directing my praise to God rather than thinking about my parents. I'm sure there are memories you have attached to certain familiar songs. That's why we like to sing them. They're like a comfortable pair of slippers. That's why there's so much opposition to new music in church. I came across an interesting article written by a leading clergyman who compiled six reasons for opposing the trend of new music in the church: (see if you agree with his observations)

1. It's not as melodious as the more established style.
2. This new music creates disturbances and causes people to act in an indecent and disorderly manner.
3. It places too much emphasis on instruments rather than on godly lyrics.
4. The lyrics are often worldly, even blasphemous.
5. It is not needed, since preceding generations have gone to heaven without it.
6. These new musicians are young upstarts and some of them are lewd and loose persons.

by Dr. David O. Dykes • Part 3 of 3 in “Are You Plugged In?” a series about the importance of being plugged in to the best God has for you

If you’d like a copy of that article, you may want to know it was written in 1783 as a statement against the use of hymns. (Including “Blessed be the Name” and “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”)

If we aren’t careful, we will start judging the value of praise songs based upon how they make us feel rather than whether they direct praise to God. So here is a very valuable

WORSHIP TIP: The goal of worship is to honor God, NOT to please the worshiper

It would be great if each of us could just toss out everything we’ve ever heard, done or thought about worship our whole lives, and just commit ourselves to worship the way the Bible tells us to worship.

Some Christians say, “Oh, but Psalms is the Old Testament. And we aren’t under the Old Covenant anymore. I want to worship the New Testament way.” I’ve had people actually say to me we shouldn’t worship the way the Psalms teach us. Why? Because that was for Jews, and that’s not part of our “tradition.” For instance, their “tradition” says dancing is sinful, so those passages in Psalms about dancing unto the Lord just have to be wrong. Their tradition says “lifting hands to the Lord” is only for charismatic who speak in tongues and get slain the spirit, so all those passages about lifting holy hands unto the Lord were just for the Jews. And, our tradition says we sit or stand, but we don’t “bow down before the Lord” that’s for the Jews, or maybe those Catholics. But they will close their eyes when they pray, as if it’s a sacred act when the Bible never speaks of closing your eyes or bowing your head!

Truthfully, we aren’t under the Old Covenant, and we don’t have to obey all the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. But Psalms isn’t a book of the law—it’s a worship book. And the New Testament even confirms New Testament Christians under the New Covenant are still to use the Psalms. In fact, Ephesians 5:19 gives us a simple music plan for New Testament worship: Ephesians 5:19: “Speak to one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”

Psalms means singing the scripture. We should sing, “Shout to the Lord all the earth let us sing” because it’s taken right out of scripture. Hymns (Greek ode) are songs carefully composed to give praise to God. Martin Luther sat down and took time to write, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” Spiritual songs (*pneumatikas*) are like choruses because they are songs often created when someone is singing spontaneous praise to God.

Today you are in for great treat! You’re going to be so glad you came to this service. Let me explain. Would you believe yesterday I was playing golf with some guys down at the new Pine Dunes course near Frankston. After the round, we were in the refreshment area drinking coffee. It was so cold hardly anybody else was there, but we saw three guys sitting at another table. And one of them was Emmitt Smith. I later found out he is considering being an investor in a big golf development near there. He looked over and smiled at us and said “It’s too cold for me to play out there!” I said, “Nah, we’re tough. I thought you’d be in San Diego for the Super Bowl today.” He said, “No man, if can’t play in it, I don’t want to be there.” To make a long story short, I introduced myself and explained I’m from Florala, Alabama. Emmitt played high school

football at Escambia High School outside of Pensacola, and I grew up playing against that school. He’s a lot younger than me but he remembered playing ball at Floral High School. He asked me what I did and I told him about Green Acres.

He’s a believer, and he gave glory to Jesus when he broke Walter Payton’s rushing record, and I told him I appreciated that. I found out he was heading back to Dallas this morning, so I asked him if he’d be willing to stop by and give a word of testimony. He said “maybe” so we gave him the directions and times, and I just got word he’s here—I told our broadcast ministry this might happen so to have something ready to welcome him. So let’s do that—will you join me in giving a rousing welcome to the NFL’s all-time leading rusher: Emmitt Smith!!!!

Emmitt’s not really here. I just made all that up. I started out by asking, “Would you believe?” But I did it to make a point about worship I hope you *never* forget. Isn’t it interesting how we can get so pumped up and excited and loud about a human celebrity in our midst? When every single time we gather together, there is someone here who is far more important than any human celebrity? I heard what you did when you thought Emmitt was here. Well, let’s try again. Let’s give a rousing welcome to Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Now, folks, help me out. Please don’t tell the folks coming in the next worship what’s going on.

This is a good transition into the next characteristic:

3. BIBLICAL WORSHIP: IS USUALLY NOISY

In Ezra 3:13, we read the sound of the shouts of praise and the sound of weeping was so loud it could be heard far away. Private worship may be quiet and meditative, but corporate worship in the Bible gets pretty noisy sometimes!

Psalm 98:4-5: “Shout loudly to God, everybody! Let loose and sing! Strike up the band! Round up an orchestra to play for God, add on a hundred voice choir. Feature trumpets and big trombones; fill the air with praises to King God!” (*The Message*) Sounds like Sunday morning at Green Acres!

There is a time and place for quiet meditative reflection and prayer, and we also provide opportunities for that. But I don’t understand why some folks insist worship must be quiet to be reverent. In fact, in the church where I grew up, there was a scripture verse written near every entrance that said, “The Lord is in His Holy Temple. Let all the earth keep silent before Him.” So, we would sneak in and quietly worship. When we started doing our radical “youth musicals” like “Good News” and “Tell it Like it is” we had to do it in the fellowship hall because we were using guitars, and heaven forbid, those devil drums!

Years later I found that verse in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 20. I was amazed to learn the verse had nothing to do with worship. It’s about how God is on the verge of

pouring out the wrath of His judgement on unrighteousness—so *all* the earth had better be quiet because God is in the house!

Worship should be reverent, but reverent doesn’t mean quiet. The word “reverent” means to “revere” and to “honor.” In the Old Testament, the word basically means to “bow down.” In the New Testament the word “reverence” appears five times in the KJV, but the word isn’t used in reference to God. For instance, Ephesians 5 says wives are to “revere” their husbands. Is that what you do, ladies? “Shh. It’s my husband; I must be quiet in his presence.” The word means to “respect.”

You don’t have to be quiet to show respect. If President George W. Bush visited our church, I can imagine everyone would stand to their feet and give him a five-minute standing ovation—that would show we respect him and revere him.

Here’s your next

WORSHIP TIP: Making a joyful noise HERE is a rehearsal for worship in HEAVEN!

Get ready. It’s going to be noisy in heaven! We read in Revelation 19:6: “Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud and like loud peals of thunder, shouting, ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns!’” Have you ever visited Niagara Falls? You can hear the sound of the water long before you see it. Multiply that by about a million times and you begin to approach the volume of the praise that will be directed toward Jesus in heaven!

4. BIBLICAL WORSHIP: MAY BE EXPRESSED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

There is only one right way to worship—that’s biblical worship. But the good news is, within the scope of Biblical worship, there is a rich variety of different ways to express your worship. God is a God of infinite variety, and there is a rich variety of ways to express our worship to God. One of our problems is our worship services sometimes get in a rut and this Sunday is a repeat from last Sunday which is a repeat from the Sunday before. Every experience of worship should be like a fresh encounter with God.

Because God is a God of variety, here is an important

WORSHIP TIP: Don’t get uptight if someone worships differently than you.

In Ezra 3 some of the people were shouting praises of “hallelujah.” But not everyone was doing that. Some of the older folks were so moved when they laid the foundation they expressed their worship in a totally different way. They began to weep. The weepers didn’t say to the shouters, “Hey, stop shouting, you ought to be weeping!” And the shouters didn’t say to the weepers, “Hey, stop crying, you ought to be shouting!” No, even though these people were expressing their worship in two totally different ways, it all blended together into a beautiful symphony of worship.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (KJV) says, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty! And we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.” *The Message* says, “When God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We’re free of it! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of His face.”

Worship is standing before God and seeing His face with our eyes of faith. The light of His presence is so brilliant, we are blinded to anyone and anything else except His presence. When you become aware of His Holy presence, you’ll have the freedom and liberty to express your worship.

I have a vision of a church where people can come and clap if they want to clap, but if someone else doesn’t clap, it’s no big deal to the clapper or the non-clapper. But if you clap, you clap because you are clapping to the Lord like it says in Psalm 47:1, not because someone else is or isn’t clapping. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.

CONCLUSION

I have a vision of a church where believers can come and feel free to lift their hands to God in worship (folded hands or lifted hands) in worship. But you do it *not* because someone tells you to, or because you want to draw attention to yourself, but because you are looking into the face of God and you’re lifting your hands up like a child reaching for his daddy. When the Spirit of the Lord is here, people who don’t lift their hands will have the liberty not to be distracted by someone who does. They’ll be too focused in expressing our worship to God in another way.

Wouldn’t it be great to be a part of a church where everyone feels the liberty to come to the altar and fall on their face and pray—even without being invited? And when someone does that, nobody gets uptight. And if the Lord leads you to go kneel next to that person and pray with them, you do that without me saying, “Will someone come pray with this brother?”

If you yell when I say “Open your Bibles,” do it because you are genuinely excited about looking into God’s Word—not because someone says you ought to do it. If you don’t yell, don’t worry about those that do. If you want to show your reverence to God’s Word by standing when I read it—do it. Not to show off, but because it’s one way you express your respect to the God of the Word. Get it? Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty!

Now, don’t worry. We aren’t going to take the attitude of “anything goes.” Only Biblical expressions of worship belong in a church. Everything must be done decently and in order, and if anyone ever gets out of order, I’ll say, “You are out of order.” But I believe that’s the kind of worship that honors and blesses God.

Are you plugged in to God’s best this year? Are you plugged into a small group where you can study God’s Word and experience the joy of Christian friends? Are you plugged in to giving your money to God to support His Work? If you want to get plugged into worship. Get your eyes off others, and get your eyes off yourself, and focus on giving God the glory.

OUTLINE

Biblical worship:

1. Follows the directions of the Bible

Worship Tip: You need BOTH meditative (private) and celebrative (corporate) worship encounters.

(In the midst of earth shattering troubles) "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." *Psalms 46:10*

2. Is expressing praise to/about God

Worship Tip: The goal of worship is to honor God, NOT to please the worshiper

"Speak to one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." *Ephesians 5:19*

3. Is usually noisy

"Shout loudly to God, everybody! Let loose and sing! Strike up the band! Round up an orchestra to play for God, and add on a hundred-voice choir. Feature trumpets and big trombones, fill the air with praises to King God!" *The Message*

Worship Tip: Making a joyful noise HERE is a rehearsal for worship in HEAVEN!

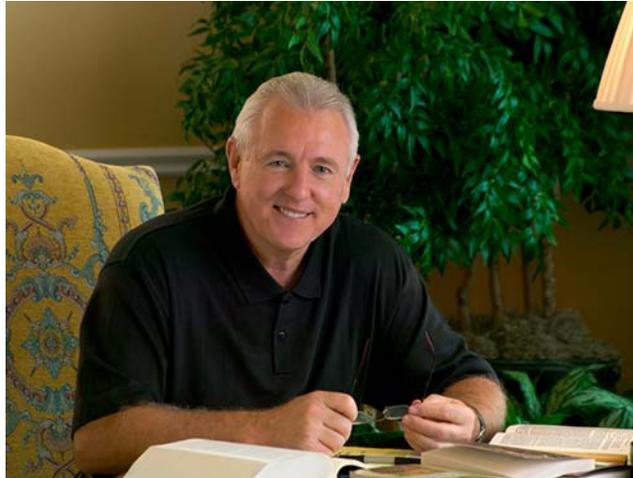
"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting, 'HALLELUJAH! FOR OUR LORD GOD ALMIGHTY REIGNS!'" *Revelation 19:6*

4. May be expressed in a variety of ways

Worship Tip: Don't get uptight if someone worships differently than you.

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty! And we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." *2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (KJV)*

"When God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We're free of it! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of His face." *The Message*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes