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Responding to God...*Forever*

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These days, “Worship” means this: we meet in a large room, very churchy in nature, wooden beams, banners, and organ pipes. A lot like a wooden ship that has been turned over and wooden benches put underneath it. If you didn’t grow up Lutheran like I did, it might look like a refurbished warehouse with people evenly dispersed throughout the room, all facing forward. Up front is an organized musical team singing the prepackaged worship songs.

I know there are variations on this. It can be an organ player and someone classically trained doing that arm wave thing as we follow along in a hymnal. Or it can be a band representing a number of genres - rock, emo, soft rock, funk, R&B, etc. And for the most part, this team is ultra energetic and peppy. We follow along by reading the words on the screen (overhead or projector, or from memory). And, if it’s a particularly favorite song, we don’t need any cues. We’re singing and clapping at appropriate times, and even closing our eyes if we really mean it.

I’m exaggerating a bit, but isn’t this what most of what our corporate worship experiences look like? For the most part, the times of gathering together and singing corporately songs to our Creator are a beautiful experience. What gets me though is when I get to a spot where I ponder eternity, where I think about an existence in relationship to all of humanity

and to the I AM WHO I AM, and where I am told I will "worship God forever", it is this corporate musical scenario that is put into that infinite timeline. For me, quite frankly, the thought of doing this forever sounds boring, non-enjoyable, and almost torturous.

This idea of our heavenly situation is obviously wrong. I can't believe the God who created peanut butter, parakeets, and shivering would ever come up with this lame scenario. Seriously, if it were so, would the band have to practice, or would they just divinely know it all? And who would run the powerpoint? Nobody likes that job... and I'm sure that someone who got put in that job might contemplate if they are really in heaven, or this is their hell?

The problem though is when this "worship forever" thing is mentioned, I've never been presented with something else to insert into my mental constructs. It's this corporate building thing that always pops in. There has to be more.

This thinking started me on a journey in prayer, seeking what worship could be. I started at the beginning – Genesis. I wanted to find the first time worship is mentioned in the Bible. I'm not a Hebrew scholar and maybe I missed some key hidden definition that can only be found with a PHD, but with my English translation bible and the holy spirit, the first use of worship comes up with Abraham. And it's this...

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"
"Here I am," he replied.*

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

*On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will **worship** and then we will come back to you."*

(Genesis 22:1-4)

This scenario is nothing like the clapping and the singing that we are used too. What it sounds like is something very painful and demanding. It sounds like sacrifice. In this story, obedience and sacrifice are the mode of worship. This passage, along with Romans 12:1 creates what I think is the starting point for proper worship. We should offer ourselves as holy and pleasing sacrifices to God. This is our spiritual act of worship.

The second time worship is mentioned is when Abraham sends his servant to go get a wife for his son Isaac. The servant goes on a journey far away and prays that God would reveal the choice in a very specific way.

Everything happens the way he prayed for and the servant drops to his knees and worships the Lord. [need a ref] Here, worship erupts from a place of thanksgiving.

Obedience, sacrifice, thanksgiving, praise. Out of all these varying situations, it seems to me that the heart of it is purely a response to all of who God is - His will, His requests, His nature, His character, His goodness, wonder, mercy, etc.

"Worship" then is the word describing our interaction with God. Living a life of worship is living a life that is constantly responding to God. When we put this definition in the context of eternity, it sounds pretty great. That means, *worshipping God forever* really means *responding to God forever*.

This relationship is modeled in the idea of marriage. In fact, that's what we see scripturally how God frames our connection to him. In the garden we are naked and one with him. There is a great divorce where we have to move out. But his intent is to always get back to being among us again (dwell with you).

Then Jesus comes. He says that eternal life is that you would know the father and the son whom he has sent. That word "know" is the same word on how a husband knows his wife. Oneness. Marriage. And when he comes back to restore all things, what do we see happening? A marriage. A groom coming to get his bride. And what are we going to do from there? Be married and live together.

So, we are married, in a sense, to the almighty. Through Jesus we are offered the chance to experience this kind of connection now. Although there is an absence of that garden presence, we can still *know* him. Living a life of worship is living a life in *response* to him - in praise and adoration of course, but also in obedience, sacrifice, grief, and thanksgiving.

For sure, all of this is important for our connectedness to God. But the greater question is this: How will you lead students in this relationship? In what ways will you create moments of connection, where they can interact with the love of their savior. Will it be a reliance on a prepackaged plan you've always trusted? Or will you launch out into new territory, seeking to connect students in their joyfull response to God.