

I AM A WORSHIPPER!

A number of years ago I heard a Focus on the Family tape of a woman who was speaking to a group of writers at a Christian Writers' Convention. I couldn't see what was happening, but I pictured in my mind the huge crowd settling down as a twisted figure, the person to be the keynote speaker, came onto the stage. The woman had Cerebral Palsy. Perhaps she had an electric wheelchair, the kind that seems to throw its passengers around as they maneuver about. Or maybe someone had to wheel her in. Her hands had the characteristic curl making it difficult for her to hold a microphone. Perhaps someone had to put it in her hands for her, or hold it or position a boom mike for her. I can imagine the thoughts of the crowd as they waited: "Wow, that poor woman....what a life....how is she going to speak?...will we be able to understand her?...what could she possibly say?" The audience quieted. Finally she began to speak, eyes, lips and face contorting with each word, "I...AM...A...WRITER." The crowd was stunned. One could almost see the paradigm shift happening in the minds of her listeners. This was not just a disabled person, not just someone who needs a lot of help, not just someone difficult to look at. Once again she struggled to form the words, "I...AM...A...WRITER!" As the significance of this incredible statement swept the listeners, they burst to their feet in spontaneous ovation.

I don't remember anything else she said! But I want you to keep this picture in your minds. I'm praying that we'll have a similar paradigm shift on a different topic in a few moments...on the topic of worship.

My husband, Tom, and I grew up attending church services. That seemed to be what worship was: attending a service. As we began our family, God gave us a desire for something more, something more soul-satisfying in worship. We used to visit friends across the state, and when we'd go to their church there seemed to be something different about their worship. One thing we noticed is that some of the songs were sung TO God. We were used to songs of doctrine, or singing about God or singing songs of encouragement to other believers. And these are all good and appropriate. But the songs we were singing were sung TO God. It changed our focus from us to Him. It was the beginning of a fascinating adventure in learning to worship.

Pastor and author John Piper says, "Worship is gladly reflecting back to God the glory of His radiance." In other words, God pours down on us His love, His salvation, His provision, the beauty of His creation, the soul-satisfying fellowship of believers, indeed His very Self! And we reflect it back to Him in our praises and thanksgiving. This is worship. And the expressions of worship are innumerable. Scripture mentions several: singing, shouting, raising our hands, kneeling, dancing, playing musical instruments. Even our daily choice of activities and our conversations can reflect God's glory. A friend of ours once saw someone doing sign language for a deaf person at a church. As he watched, he said to himself, "THAT is how I want to worship the Lord." He learned how to sign and occasionally blesses us by signing with the worship teams. It is indeed a beautiful expression of worship.

For years I was curious about why some people raise their hands during the singing at church. I just thought they'd come from different traditions, or were perhaps more emotional than others, or even that some were drawing attention to themselves. I remember asking God one time, "Is this hand-raising something you like?" I didn't get an immediate answer, but over several months, as I read the Bible, I noticed certain verses, such as, Psalm 63:4 "Thus I will bless you while I live, I will lift up my hands in Your Name," and Psalm 134:2 "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord." Gradually God helped me add this simple expression to my worship repertoire.

Somewhere along this journey of learning to worship, something major happened. Remember the paradigm shift that the audience experienced? It didn't happen as quickly

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for me, but gradually I began to realize: I'm not just an attender, as important as that is. I'm not just a learner, not just a musician, not just someone graciously saved from hell. But I AM A WORSHIPPER! Do you see the significance of this shift of paradigm? I am a worshipper of the Lord Jesus Christ. This new focus changes everything! I used to think that the whole point of Christianity was to get everyone saved... "Phew, now they're saved!" But now I see that as just the beginning. We want new Christians to grow and become true worshippers. Why? Because then God gets more praise, more worship. As a mom, I want to raise good kids, but even more so, I want them to become worshippers. Why? So that God gets the glory. He gets more praise, more worship. We want our homes and lives to be pleasing to the Lord. Why? So that they reflect back to God the worship He desires and that we were created for. We are designed to worship, so we WILL worship something. But we are only satisfied when that worship focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ.