

A CAMPFIRE OF WORSHIP

How often have we sat beside a campfire in the evening and been almost hypnotized, gazing at the fire. There is something wonderfully comforting in the sight, smell, and sound of logs burning. I am sure we have all had many happy hours singing songs of praise to the Lord in such a peaceful environment. In addition to pleasant memories, this campfire contains a special lesson for us if we will gaze deeply into the blaze flowing out of the ignited logs. The campfire provides us with an excellent picture of praise and worship.

As we gaze into the fire there are three things which draw attention to themselves. The first and most obvious are the beautiful, heart lifting, flickering flames. Their colors flash and dance and they move about most unpredictably. With colors varying from a brilliant blue to pale yellows, these flames dance around like an excited child. First they are here, then over there, never staying in a single place but dancing joyously all around the logs. These flickering dancing flames represent, to me, 'praise'. They even seem happy as we watch them come and go all around the heart of the fire. In the center of the fire sit the 'logs'. They are the heart of the matter but they just lay there, never moving. These logs are producing a great heat as they are consumed by the fire. Glowing embers reach deeply into the logs. Here too, things are always changing but you must look much more closely to see the changes. This deep abiding heat I liken to 'worship'. The third aspect of the campfire is the consuming of the log> raised in Missouri where oak logs were used for firewood, the logs lasted a long time. They were dense and hard, not unlike our minds and souls. Slowly, but very surely, the glowing log is being consumed. The consuming fire is not in the flickering flame but in the deep heat at the heart of the log. This is not a bad thing, that is it's purpose. As firewood, the log is fulfilling its destiny as it offers itself to give off heat and light.

First, a short disclaimer. God will not be put in a box. If I tell you that He is producing praise and worship in one way, you will observe Him also producing these same things in other ways. That is just the way He is. He will even produce praise in the hearts of those who do not believe in Him. How does He do this ?

I do not know, nor is it any of my business. He does what He chooses. I am very glad of that. Still, perhaps this analogy will be helpful to others as it has been to me.

When a spiritual child {whatever their chronological age} first realizes how great a salvation they have received, there simply must flare up, in their hearts and spirits, a flame that flickers here and there, touching all parts of their lives. This may not be a particularly hot flame, nor does it yet consume much, but it is lively and new, and no one can know just where it will go. This lively flickering flame will come and go in the saint's life. It is not always present, but when it does come, it is most welcome. When it comes, it brings joy every time, and it often sends brief flashes of light into regions that were previously dark. This lovely bright praise which reaches into our hearts like tongues of living fire may spring up at any time. The gently breeze of the Holy Spirit fans it into being, unbidden by the human heart. He may use an answered prayer or a convenient parking spot. He may use anything He chooses. This praise which flashes forth from time to time may spring up through the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit but there is another, more common cause for these flames bursting forth. The most common dynamic which produces these flashes of praise is an underlying hotbed of worship. When an attitude of worship burns deep within the mind and spirit of a believer, it is like the steady source of heat which is in, around, and through the log making up the fuel for the fire. As the log burns steadily and hot, it release hot gasses from win which spurt forth into the dancing flickering flames that are so delightful.

Praise released by the hot work of worship is a precious thing in the life of a believer, whether they be young or old. It is tragic, however, to see one who has experienced true praise try to 'manufacture' praise. This is, unfortunately, a reasonably common occurrence in our Christian lives. The primary purpose of this short teaching is to alert honest Christians to this fact of 'manufactured praise' and to help show you the way out. Praise is manufactured commonly for two reasons.

Most prominently an attempt is made to manufacture praise when we are in the company of others who are praising {or seem to be}. This is usually in some kind of church or fellowship service {even around a campfire}. This is not meant to be a criticism, just an observation. It is the time and place for praise so we 'fake it till we make it'. It is true that there are times when this works {didn't I say that Father will not be put in a box}? We begin by singing, raising our hands, etc and pretty soon we are indeed lost in praise. Other times, however, when the praise time is done, we are no nearer to praising than when we began.

The other reason praise may be manufactured is when we haven't 'done it'

for a long time and really want to. So we sing and dance and pretend we are praising, hoping that 'it' comes. Yet praise can not be manufactured by the saint. Praise is a by-product of something else, just as the flickering flames of the campfire are a by-product of a hot bed of coals which produce and ignite the escaping wood gases, driving them forth as the dancing flames. Since the heart of the matter is the log itself, let us next examine the log. When the log {Child of God} submits itself to the love of Father God, He comes as the consuming fire. Is this a bad thing? No, it is the purpose for which we were made. Is this an uncomfortable thing? Ah, that is hard to say. What do you want? What are you seeking? What is your heart's desire? If "God" is the answer to these questions, then the answer is "No", it is not a bit uncomfortable. In fact, it is delightful. We find ourselves living the role in life for which our born again spirit has been striving so long. We enter into the 'joy of our salvation'. We become more and more 'ourselves', our real selves, the true person which we have always longed to be. This is a wonderful, most precious thing to happen to us. If 'self' is still strong, we will certainly find discomfort in this process because it is this very same self which is being consumed.

What is the hot bed of coals? It is worship! Praise must always flow out of worship just as the flames of the campfire flow out of the deep heat at the core of the log. All too often we have tried to produce worship by making praise sounds. This is the manufactured variety and does not produce true praise. What then is 'worship'?

What you shall read next is this author's opinion. Please feel free to disagree.

As we increasingly come to know the Lord, our Father, and His indwelling Holy Spirit, we will move past the stage where praise is an adequate vehicle to express our feelings. We will come to know many emotions for which there are no words. Oh, we will certainly not ever leave praise behind permanently, for it will flare up with increasing frequency as our intimacy with Father grows. It is the desire of God that we shall become 'One' with Him and that desire will be fulfilled in many of His Children. The longer we walk with Him and talk with Him, the more we will come to know Him as He is and discover who we are ***TO*** Him. This developing relationship starts a deep glowing fire between us. It does not flicker, it just burns, burns with increasing heat, and as it burns, it consumes. What does it consume? All that is not Him! It is the wood, hay, and stubble that are consumed. It is 'self'.

As this intimacy and closeness with Father continues, we begin to change. Here it

is that grace does what the law could not do. The law revealed truth, but could not make truth live in us. As we draw close to Father, we begin to see Him, and as we see Him, we become like He is. This change is produced by the warmth and closeness of relationship. We become different because we are made different. We are coming to have the 'mind of Christ'. The longer we spend with Father, the longer the 'fire' continues and the more heat and light we wend out. Changes are taking place within us because the fire of God is consuming those things which He knows are ready to be released. We do not 'burn up'. There is nothing of eternal value that is consumed. It is only those things which He sees that we need to lose. And as we lose it, we are glad. One of the great joys in the Christian life will never be understood by those who do not know God. This is the joy of seeing change in ourselves through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is not a change which comes by striving, nor of teaching, nor of the work of man. This change is internal and deep and it comes almost without our realizing it. We seek the Kingdom, we seek relationship with Father and we receive deep internal changes within ourselves. Changes that we love. I hope all of my readers have had abundant experience with this. It is one of our greatest joys to see the nature and attitudes of God become our own just because we are spending time with Him.

Praise may be compared to happiness. When some happy happenstance happens, we are happy. Similarly praise erupts when something occurs in our spirit. Worship, however, is more like joy, like God in your blood. Worship is that steady deep flowing thing that comes from an abiding intimate relationship between the little Child and the wise loving Father.

God has not made us such that we can live in a state of continual praise. He has, however, created us such that we can live in an ever deepening relationship both with Himself, and with other saints. Spirit calls to spirit. The spirit of God, our true Father, calls hauntingly to our new born spirits. The call is for us to 'know Him' and for Him to know us. "Oh, but God knows everything", you say? Then why did He tell us in scripture that a time will come when He will say "Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you". There is a type of knowing which is similar to the intimacy between a man and wife, which God states is the type of intimacy He desires between Himself and us {You and me, the bride}. It is this type of relationship that He has never had with some who claim to do miracles in His name. Many study scripture and through them come to know about God, even as they know about Moses, Abraham, or George Washington.

Those who know about God will, indeed must extol His virtue, His power, His wisdom, and His love. This will elicit their praise, but knowing about, this

impersonal knowledge, can never create the deep bonded interaction which creates the steady warmth of hot coals. That requires relationship. I have had the privilege of knowing people from many countries, cultures, and religions. I have passing knowledge of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhists, and the Chinese beliefs. Many of these inspire zeal in their believers. Many of them have adherents that are dedicated to all the laws and rituals. Many of them cause the followers to hope for a good afterlife. None of them inspire great 'LOVE' for God. It is only in Christianity, it is only in those Christians who develop an intimate relationship with Father God that we find overwhelming expressions of love. This is the only group on the planet wherein the love grows exponentially with relationship. To 'know Him' is to 'love Him'.

As we seek Him, seek Him in scripture, seek Him in nature, seek Him in prayer, seek Him with diligence – He will always be found. He has said so. He has equipped you to have spiritual ears to hear Him. Seek and you WILL find. This is a promise. As you find him, you will discover that He is nice to know. Our great creator God, more powerful than anyone can imagine, is a very nice person. You will discover countless random acts of goodness, kindness, patience, gentleness, and mercy spattered through your life. He does not remain hidden from eyes that desire to see. As the relationship matures you may, at times, almost see praise as a surface thing {it is not}. What you are feeling goes beyond words – it is the consuming fire. Here it is that the deepest true worship is born. Worship, born this way, is deep and abiding. Out of these hot embers, flames and flashes of praise easily ignite, at any moment, from any tiny incident.

When I was doing a lot of personal counseling and ministry, I would often tell a "Bear Story" which I learned in a class I took. I will give it here in greatly abbreviated form. This concerns emotions such as fear. Imagine walking through an idyllic forest on a beautiful spring day. You are hearing the birds and enjoying the walk. Suddenly, as you are approaching your cabin, you see a bear and the bear sees you. The bear chases you and you run into your cabin and bolt the door. Your emotion, on a scale of 1 to 10 is running about 8. Next you hear an awful noise at the door of the cabin which seems about to come off it's hinges. This noise is the sort to generate an increase of fear which we would rate at a 4. You can only go to ten so you overflow.

This is told to illustrate how sometimes people who are living rather stressful lives are seen to 'overflow' over seemingly trivial incidents. Well, it is just the same with worship and praise, only in the opposite direction.

When you are walking with the Lord, feeling and knowing an intimacy with Him, growing in relationship, you are sitting at an 8 or 9 out of 10. Not on the fear scale but on the peace and security scale. Along comes a small random act of kindness by the Lord and you are apt to overflow in praise very easily.

Let your life become a bonfire. Respond to the haunting call of God to your new born spirit and develop an intimate relationship with Him. This will produce joy and worship such as you have not heretofore known. Out of that deep heat will come praise with increasing frequency.

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ABSENCE OF BONDAGE
IN YOUR LIFE.**

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