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3 Steps to Better Worship... *When You Don't Feel Like It*

by Jack Wilkie

Every few months the folks at my local community center put on a dinner event of some kind, and the way they pay for such events has always struck me as funny. They say that there is no admission fee, but they'll also tell you to bring \$5 for a "mandatory donation." That, folks, is what we call an oxymoron.

But it's that idea of a mandatory donation that made me start thinking about the worship we offer to God. In a sense, when you read the Bible you can see that worship is mandatory for Christians. On the other hand, it's a donation of sorts, something that really doesn't mean anything unless we give it out of our own free will. That doesn't mean every Christian is doing so at any given time of worship, though. On any given Sunday, there are those who don't want to be there so they attend physically but not in spirit, those who enjoy worship but aren't consumed with it, and those with the heart of David, who have no thought of themselves and are purely focused on God's glory.

That David-like worship is what we all should strive for, of course. But the reality of our Christian lives is that we all face peaks and valleys. Sometimes we might not feel like it. What do we do to get back to that passionate worship that God desires? We all face our own unique struggles, but keeping these three truths about worship in mind will help us stay out of the rut.

Worship must be natural. If you and I met a country music star it wouldn't mean a thing to me, but if you're a fan you might be really excited about the occasion. If what the person does isn't important to me and I don't know who they are, why would meeting them mean anything to me? So it is with God. If we don't know what He's doing in our lives week in and week out, and we don't know who He truly is from the Scriptures, any songs we sing will just be echoing someone else's praise for God rather than emanating from within our own hearts. We sometimes sing a hymn from David's words in Psalm 42:1 about how our desire for God is akin to a deer's desire for water as she runs through the woods. Without regularly seeking a respite in prayer and study, that is meaningless to us, but when we take that time for the Lord, suddenly it changes everything.

Worship must be prepared. Sometimes you will hear Christians come away from worship talking about what they got out of it, and that's not wrong, but we should also be concerned with what we put into worship. If we're not coming into worship with our hearts and minds in the right place, it's so much more difficult to receive any encouragement or strength from it. It's for this reason that God calls His people to simply stop and focus on Him. In Luke 5:16 

we see Jesus get away from the crowds for alone time with God, even in the midst of the crazy schedule of His ministry. If Jesus, who was God in the flesh, still felt it vital to find time with the Father, so must we. Distracted worship isn't whole-hearted worship, but when we take time to clear our heads beforehand, our relationship with God grows deeper each time we worship. Take some time to sing hymns as you go about your week, and clear some time on Saturday night or Sunday morning to mentally clear everything else out of the way and focus on God alone.

Worship must be from the heart. John 4:24 tells us that God must be worshiped in spirit and truth. We put a lot of time into making sure we worship in truth, focusing on getting our doctrines of worship correct. That's a great thing about the church, but that's only half of the equation. Worshiping in spirit includes living a life that aligns with what God wants. As David pointed out in Psalm 51, God doesn't care about the technical commandments He gave for worship if our hearts aren't in the right place. Saturday's willful sin will always hinder Sunday's technically correct worship. Additionally, to have our hearts in the right place, we need to have healthy fellowship with our fellow Christians. Worship is not solely an individual endeavor, and if we are at odds with our church family or have little to do with them, it's difficult to raise our spirits as one. What we do and how we treat each other throughout the week has a profound influence on how we connect with the Father in worship. If there is some secret sin in your life or you know you're not doing something you should, make it right. Having a clear, cleansed conscience before God puts our hearts in the right place to sing his praises, remember Christ's sacrifice, and hear the word proclaimed.

Yes, worship is a mandatory donation for Christians, but the more we make it natural, prepare for it, and get our hearts in the right place, the more the commandments to worship are unnecessary. Worship is only meaningful when it's something we can't help but do. It should flow forth from us like an endless river, and that's exactly what happens when we go through these three steps each week.