

Worship Matters Video Intensive with Bob Kauflin
Session 8: Effects of Leading: Spirit-Empowered Living and Hope
(From Chapters 16-17 of *Worship Matters*)¹
Transcript

Welcome to Session 8 of the Worship Matters Video Intensive. In the last session we looked at the first fruit of faithful leading which is people proclaiming the gospel of Christ. In this session we want to look at two more effects: cherishing God's presence and living for God's glory.

I. God's Presence in the Bible

Throughout the Bible, the corporate worship of God's people has always been connected to God's presence. It's like this silver thread that runs through the whole Bible, beginning with God dwelling with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis and ending with this scene in Revelation 21:3:

"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." - Revelation 21:3²

Between Genesis and Revelation is the story of God's desire to have a people among whom he can dwell. So, that happened first in the tabernacle, then the temple, then in Jesus himself—God with us—and now in the church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. You could say that God's presence is both the means by which he works out his plans for his people, and also the goal of those plans.

II. God's Presence Today

We often connect God's presence with singing. Is there some special power that music has to make God present? Is worship in song primarily about pursuing God's presence? It can certainly seem that way, and some people go so far as to say worship in song is all about God's presence. I understand why.

Who hasn't been in a time of singing when suddenly you become much more aware of God's being with us, much more aware than we were at the start? People will often refer to that as the "manifest presence of God."

More songs than ever are being written about things like chasing after God's presence, pursuing God's presence, and longing for God's presence; but sometimes it can get confusing. There's one song that starts:

*Holy Spirit, You are welcome here
 Come, flood this place and fill the atmosphere*

Now, while filling the atmosphere may be one way to think about God's presence, I think we can be clearer. Paul says in Ephesians 5:18 that we (God's

people) are the ones to be filled with God's Spirit. Paul's encouraging us to allow the Spirit to fill us with a greater knowledge of God the Father and Jesus the Son.

Harold Best talks about the relationship between music and God's presence in his book, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, and he says this:

"Christian musicians must be particularly cautious. They can create the impression that God is more present when music is being made than when it is not; that worship is more possible with music than without it; and that God might possibly depend on its presence before appearing." - Harold Best³

God isn't a genie in a bottle that we summon with the right chords, songs, or arrangements. He's not a musical butler who is at our beck and call when we ring the bell of worship.

He is God. He's the sovereign God who makes himself known wherever and whenever he pleases. He is God! But happily, he delights in making his presence known.

And that's why Psalm 105:4 exhorts us:

"Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!" - Psalm 105:4

How are we to do that without confusing the means with the source?

Well, we begin by acknowledging that God is everywhere. He's omnipresent. We see that in Psalm 139:7:

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!"
- Psalm 139:7-8

So, that means before we gather on Sunday mornings, God is there. When we head home, God is with us. On Monday morning, God is still with us. But there's more to understand about God's presence than just acknowledging that He's everywhere. Sometimes God seems "unusually present" and to understand what's going on, it helps to think of God's presence in three distinct ways.

A. Enjoy God's Promised Presence

Here's the first: God's promised presence, which we're called to enjoy. Someone asked me once how my understanding of God's presence is different now than it was 20 years ago. Without thinking about it much, I said, "I'm more grateful for God's promised presence now than I was then."

In the 1980s, Robert Rayburn, a Presbyterian pastor and theologian, wrote a fine book, *O Come, Let us Worship*, and he talked about God's promised presence in this way:

"God's presence is always a gift of His love. It can neither be worked up nor prevented by the efforts of men. It is not brought about by the church, nor is it dependent upon the strength of the faith of those who come together. It is the

fulfillment of His own promise. When His children assemble themselves to worship Him, there is nothing more certain than his promised presence."
- Robert Rayburn⁴

- God is with us when we meet because He's promised to be with us. Matthew 18:20 says,

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." - Matthew 18:20
- God has promised to be present when we sing.

"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart" - Ephesians 5:18–19
- God has promised to be present when His word is preached, so in 1 Corinthians 2:4, Paul is saying:

"And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" - 1 Corinthians 2:4
- God is present when we serve others through the power of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 says:

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."
- 1 Corinthians 12:4–6

In these and other situations, we don't need to do anything to make God present. He's there and wants us to enjoy that reality by faith. And that has effects. If we know that God has promised to be with us, it will make a difference in the way we think.

The Effects of Trusting God's Promised Presence:

- We won't feel pressure to make God "show up" when we gather. He has promised to be with us.
- We won't have to wonder if our church is "big enough" for God to show up. Whether your church is 25, 250, 2500, 25k - God is just as present in every one of those churches when we gather in his name to sing, to pray, and faithfully proclaim his word and the gospel.
- And we can emphasize being faithful more than being creative. Faithfulness is the greatest adventure. We get to watch God faithfully fulfill his promise again and again.

So, that's the first way we want to think about God's presence. Here's the another:

B. Pursue God's experienced presence

Now, if we know God is everywhere and that he has promised his presence when we gather in his name, is there anything more to ask for? Well, yes, there is.

A number of years ago I came across a quote on the Banner of Truth website (which is not known for its charismatic leanings) and it was a quote from a man named Graham Harrison in an article called *Worship and the Presence of God*. Graham has gone on to be with the Lord, but I'm glad he said this before he did:

*"There can be no substitute for that manifested presence of God which is always a biblical possibility for the people of God. When it is not being experienced **they should humbly seek him for it**, not neglecting their ongoing duties, nor denying their present blessings, but recognizing that there is always infinitely more with their God and Father who desires fellowship with those redeemed by the blood of his Son and regenerated by the work of his Spirit."* - Graham Harrison⁵

Did you get that? We don't deny the present blessing of God's promised presence, but we long for more because the Bible doesn't just tell us things we should believe about the Holy Spirit, it teaches us to expect him to reveal God to us.

And one of primary ways he does that is through spiritual gifts. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:1 that we're to "pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts." He says in 1 Corinthians 12:7,

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." - 1 Corinthians 12:7

So, God pours out his gifts when we meet so that we'll be encouraged and built up and recognize that he is in our midst. We should expect it.

Sometimes our problem is that we expect God to manifest His presence only in certain ways, or in one way—when a certain person leads or when we sing a certain song or through one kind of spiritual gift.

The Bible encourages us to see all the ways God is enabling us to experience his presence every Sunday when we gather through the gifts of His Spirit. Let God open your eyes to that and you will be amazed at what you've missed! God is revealing His presence through gifts of administration, giving, faith, teaching, serving, gifts of prophecy, words of wisdom, and more!

The ways God chooses to reveal his experienced presence are up to him. We can't manipulate it, we can't make it happen, we can't predict it. But we can long for it, we can pray for it, we can expect it, and we can rejoice in it. We want to respond to God's experienced presence humbly, recognizing that God manifests his presence due to his mercy, not our merits.

Now, asking God to reveal his presence doesn't mean looking for weird things, strange signs, or doing something different than what he's promised to do in his Word. He enables us to experience his presence in line with the Word he's always given us. Because *"there is always infinitely more with our God and Father who desires fellowship with those redeemed by the blood of his Son and regenerated by the work of his Spirit."*⁶

C. Anticipate God's Unveiled Presence

And that leads us to the third way to think about God's presence, and that's God's unveiled presence, which we're called to anticipate. That "infinitely more" will only be fully realized in the new heavens and the new earth.

On Sundays we don't want people thinking we're trying to help them reach the pinnacle of their experience with God. There is always something of the "not yet" contained in our "already." And our meetings should cultivate in people's hearts a desire and a hunger for what's to come.

Now, we can try to create these extravagant, multi-sensory experiences, trying to simulate what's to come. That's a fruitless task. We will always be jars of clay worshiping our magnificent God. And no matter how much you polish a jar of clay, it's never going to become a golden urn.

The more our meetings rely on production, performance, and polish, the harder it will be for people to see the treasure that dwells within us, and that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us, the harder it will be for them to see that we anticipate a glory that we can't even conceive of that God is preparing for those who love Him.

What we experience now is just the smallest portion of what we'll enjoy in the new heavens and the new earth. And what we experience there will be more than this vague, general euphoria. It will be the result of seeing our Savior face to face. And that thought transforms our Sunday mornings from something mundane into something miraculous, because we are getting a small foretaste of what's to come.

III. Living for God's Glory

So, leading our meetings well should result in people proclaiming the gospel, cherishing God's presence, and finally, it should lead them to living for God's glory.

That's the natural response to beholding God's glory in Christ as we're told in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where Paul says:

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." - 2 Corinthians 3:18

Now, this verse isn't specifically talking about a gathering, but it certainly can be applied to what we do when we gather to behold the glory of God through our songs and prayers and God's Word. We're not leading meetings to create this desire in people to come back to another meeting, although that's something that we look forward to every week. We want to lead them in such a way that they'll want to live lives for the glory of God rooted in the gospel, empowered by the Spirit. We're not seeking just to create "wow" moments during our meetings. The "wow" moments God is after is people faithfully living for the glory of Jesus Christ day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year.

The success of our leadership on Sunday mornings is not measured by how high people lift their hands as we gather, but how much their lives look like Jesus Christ throughout the week.

So, what does that look like? What qualities should characterize people who have had an encounter with the living Christ in the power of the Spirit on Sunday morning? Well, let me suggest a few:

- **Humility**

Our people should be increasingly humble. A fresh awareness that we did nothing to earn the privileged place we have as God's chosen and dearly loved children should produce in us humility. There's nothing about our corporate worship that should exalt *us*, despite the similarity sometimes to a rock concert. John Piper has said "people never leave the Grand Canyon more in awe of themselves." So we should never leave our gatherings more in awe of what we do or who we are; it's God who receives the glory.

- **Holiness**

Another effect of our meetings should be holiness. It's the natural response of rehearsing again and again what the Son of God had to do to purchase our salvation. Jesus died to forgive our sins, not excuse them. And when the word of Christ has dwelled in us richly, we'll want to flee from the sins that Jesus died to free us from.

- **Security**

Another effect of our gatherings should be security in God's love. Nothing grounds God's people more in God's love than firmly reminding them of the place where that love was most clearly displayed. Our security in God's love doesn't come from our circumstances, people's opinions, lack of trials, best prospects, or our performance. It's knowing that nothing "*in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:37–39). That's secure.

- **Gratefulness**

Another effect is gratefulness. Worship rooted in God's mercy—which, all true worship is—will always lead to grateful hearts. That's why God commands us so many times in the New Testament to be thankful. It's the most obvious

thing we can do. We're all doing better than we deserve! So how can we not be thankful? In fact, you can say that gratefulness is a distinguishing mark of the Christian. Listen to Colossians 3 starting in verse 15, that last part of the verse:

*And **be thankful**. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with **thankfulness** in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him." - Colossians 3:15-17*

Three times in three verses, Paul exhorts us to be thankful. In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott quotes W.M. Clow and says:

"A Buddhist temple never resounds with a cry of praise. Mohammedan worshippers never sing. Their prayers are, at the highest, prayers of submission and of request. They seldom reach the gladder note of thanksgiving. They are never jubilant with the songs of the forgiven." - W.M. Clow⁷

- **Mission-Mindedness**

A final effect that our well-led meetings should have on people is mission-mindedness. People should leave our meetings with a greater desire to share the good news we've been singing about and celebrating with others. The gospel, rightly understood, doesn't end on God's passion for us, but on God's passion for his glory. Now it certainly includes God's passion for us. He wants His glory to be spread throughout the earth. As John Piper has famously said,

"Missions exists because worship doesn't."⁸

That's why we sing songs like this:

(♪sings)
*Lord use us as you want, whatever the test
 By grace we'll preach your gospel 'till our dying breath*

*Let Your kingdom come
 Let Your will be done
 So that everyone might know Your name
 Let Your song be heard
 Everywhere on earth
 'Till Your sovereign work on earth is done
 Let Your kingdom come⁹*

That's our prayer. That's our heart. That's our desire.

Now there are many more effects of Christ-exalting, well-led meetings that we haven't covered, but you can be sure that as we seek to magnify God's glory in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, God will transformed lives for His glory and for eternal joy.

Session 8 Discussion Questions:

1. What is a Biblical understanding of God's presence?
2. What narrow understandings of God's presence have you had to work through in your own life and leadership?
3. What is meant by God's promised presence? What implications does this have on how we approach our gatherings?
4. List some of the ways you see God's experienced presence in your church on any given Sunday.
5. What effects should a well-led, gospel-centered, Christ-exalting meeting have on people? How do we want people leaving our meetings?
6. How can you grow personally in your understanding of and experience with the Holy Spirit?

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⁵ Taken from "Worship and the Presence of God," by Graham Harrison on BannerofTruth.org. Used by permission given March 27, 2017.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Taken from *The Cross in Christian Experience* by W.M. Clow. Published 1910 by Hodder & Stoughton (London), p. 278.

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