

The Encouragement Newsletter

Praise and Worship

It is Sunday morning. It is the traditional day the saints of the Most High God gather. People drive, walk, catch a cab or bus to this great gathering in buildings of various sizes and shapes. Some with a steeple and some without. Some people meet in schools and others meet in warehouse buildings. The gatherers dress in many different ways. Some come dressed in suits, dresses and hats. Others sport the latest Jordan's, jeans (straight, skinny, super skinny, boot cut, etc.) and t-shirt. This is the gathering of the old, young, rich, middle class, poor and those of different cultures. No matter the location, size of the building or attire, it is the gathering of those called out of darkness into His marvelous light - the Ekklesia—the Church.

Some rejoice to hear and recall to mind, the verse in Psalm 122:1, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." For others, the verse is translated, "I was mad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." The reasons for gathering are varied, but I want to ask one question of you. Why do you gather? Why do you go through such effort to get to the building? What motivates you? Is it tradition? A position you hold, which requires you to attend the gathering? Is it to socialize with the people you have not seen all week? Is it to make an announcement for an event you are sponsoring or meet with the people to provide the details? Is it to hear the choir or praise team sing "your song"? Is it just to take communion? Is it to hear the Pastor's "word"? Only you can answer and give the true reason or identify that motivation. But, let me submit to you that our first and foremost reason for gathering with the saints is to Praise and Worship the Lord. This should be high on the agenda. Everything else, although it may be important, is secondary.

Gathering to Praise and Worship the Lord as a corporate body of believers is one of the most powerful things on earth.. When we sound one voice and do what we have been doing all week long, His glory will be manifested in some way. This is evident in both II Chronicles 5 and II Chronicles 7. The glory will not just come to make us "feel good", but it will come to turn our hearts (no matter the condition) towards Him. This glory is not just for this weekly event. It is an everlasting glory that will rest and abide with us throughout our journey on the road of life. It

is nothing mystical, magical or spooky. It should be a very normal thing in the life of the saints.

We need to realize that Praise and Worship comes in more than one form. It includes singing, lifting up holy hands, giving, repentance, hearing the word of the Lord and most of all—Obedience. In other words, the intention of the gathering is to Praise and Worship the Lord in countless ways. It is a time to surrender ourselves in heartfelt adoration as a corporate body of believers.

This newsletter will be full of questions and answers for your simple contemplation. So, here is another — What hinders our Praise and Worship? There are many hindrances. I will list some and then challenge you to rethink the purpose of the gathering of the saints.

HINDRANCE #1 —LACK OF UNDERSTANDING.

For too many gatherings, the focus has become self-centered. It is about what the people want. People and money have become the driver of what takes place at the gathering. It is almost like the McDonald's drive-thru. The point of any drive-thru is to make an order, pay and get food...Quickly. We want music, which for typically opens and closes the gatherings, two songs (one fast/one slow), preaching, short prayer and benediction at lightening speed. There is no thought of what the Lord wants...or desires. If He does not come in within our time schedule...then oh well. We move on because "we have more important things to do" and we have the carefully crafted "order of service" to accommodate such attitudes. I am here to tell you that the Lord really wants to disrupt our "order of service" and show Himself strong in our midst. I am not saying we should just have a lot of emotional releases for the sake of our flesh. When it is just emotional, we continue to do the things that offend Him, but when the Lord shows up, there is change. I am not saying that when the manifest presence of the Lord is experienced in a gathering we cease to have problems. Problems will always be among us because we are all a work in progress, but we should be experiencing personal and corporate change as we go from one degree of glory to the next in our Praise and Worship.

HINDRANCE #2 —Lack Of Preparation and Expectation

The gathering is treated as if it is “just another day.” For some they can “take it or leave it.” It is not a lifeline. The benefits of being with the community of believers is not a necessary part of the week. Many are unable to go to a physical place to Praise and Worship the Lord with the saints. They may crave for the fellowship of others at the place of gathering, but they take advantage of virtual services, DVDs or other electronic media to be in a gathering. For them, this time is just as fulfilling. However, I am writing to address the saints that have the capability to gather each week in a physical location.

Indeed, so much consumes our time and energy. Therefore, there is no expectation and the gathering becomes yet another thing on the “To Do” list. For some, it does not matter what they look like and it does not matter if they are late. In some circles, it has been taught that the word is the most important part of the gathering. Everything else is just the preliminaries. Yes, hearing the word is very important, but in reality, this part of the gathering is “for us”. During this time of the gathering, we posture ourselves to hear and receive the word of the Lord. Generally, we are not in a posture of giving, but receiving. If we say that the word is the most important and everything else is just the preliminaries, again, it is a self-centered motivation for gathering. Why not begin to prepare the mind, heart and body for the gathering by having the mindset to engage in every facet of the gathering. Let us all discontinue treating the day as “just another day with this one thing I must do.” Making individual change will result in a greater expectation of the Lord’s ability to do exceedingly, abundantly above all we could ever imagine in our midst.

HINDRANCE #3—DISTRACTIONS

Personal Issues —Personal issues can become so overwhelming and we do not even want to be at the gathering. Because of burdens, we cannot or do not want to sing. Things can be so stressful that our minds cannot move past pressing issues. In these moments we must learn how to quiet our minds and focus on what the Spirit is saying to the church whether it is in song or with spoken words.

Psalm 150 tells all, “Let everything that has breath Praise the Lord”. There are no conditions listed in Psalm 150. It does not take into consideration our hard times. In fact Psalm 61:1-2 says, “Hear my cry, Oh God...When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” If you are breathing...praise the Lord. If you are overwhelmed, run to the Rock, who is Christ Jesus, by entering into the gathering with thanksgiving in your heart.

Next, I want to provide some distractions that occur at the actual gathering.

THE PULPIT (i.e., Stage, the place up-front) — Most gatherings are set up to include a “pulpit area” where both the musicians, singers and leadership carry out their functions for the gathering. With this set up, those on the pulpit are the primary focus of the congregation. Singers and musicians are generally seated in proximity to the pastors and/or leaders on the pulpit because they too are leaders with key roles, even if they do not have a title or not readily acknowledged as such. Both positions carry a powerful ability to have a positive or negative influence within the congregation.

Because the pulpit area is the focal point, it can be a major distraction. Some in the congregation find it difficult to focus because they are looking at the activity on the pulpit (i.e., who is sitting where, who is entering or exiting the pulpit area, etc.). I actually serve on the pulpit as a singer and musician and the movement on the pulpit can be a distraction. I have found it best to close my eyes when singing or look directly at the speaker. With much prayer, I am able to tune out the activity both mentally and physically and focus. Because movement on the pulpit can be distracting, we who serve on the pulpit, must be conscientious about this and help people focus by having as little movement as possible.

Another pulpit distraction is looking at the attire of the individuals on the pulpit. Serving up front, I have found it a little amusing, yet troubling, the attention people give to clothing. The fashion police are in full force some Sundays. I believe it is a good thing to look nice, neat and admire those who look thus. King David, the singers and musicians were adorned in fine linen, according to I Chronicles 15:27, but fashion (or lack thereof) of those on the pulpit, should not be the focus. The focus is Jesus.

Since I am on the topic of fashion and the pulpit area, let me share a few words to the wise and quickly move on. For those serving in a position on the pulpit, it is so important for us to be prudent in our attire. I have found that clothing for both men and women have become more provocative— revealing curves, form and skin. It is challenging for women to find proper fitting blouses and dresses that do not expose the cleavage, but it is possible to find. Not long ago, church mothers would not hesitate to talk with the women about inappropriate attire for not only “up front” ministry, but for God’s house in general. We need loving mothers to rise and teach again. Men are not exempt. They can have fashion challenges also. Their clothing (i.e., slacks) have become tighter and revealing. Today, clothing for men and women are designed to bring attention in a seductive way. We must remember that wearing seductive fashions will definitely shift the focus to us. I appeal to you, if you have the responsibility of serving on the pulpit in any way, be sure to be fashion conscience and wear attire that does not distract from Jesus and attract to you. Now I move on...

In the book titled “Facing the Wall” by Don Potter, he shares a vision he had about the position of musicians and singers as they ministered before the ark day and night in the Tabernacle of David. (*This is not in scripture. It is only a vision of what he saw.*) What I found interesting about the vision is the musicians and singers were not positioned facing the entrance of the tent. They were positioned with their backs to the entrance and faced the ark. Can you imagine this set up in our gatherings today? I believe this positioning would cause those who serve on the pulpit (i.e., preachers, singers and musicians) to be motivated to do exactly what the Lord says. Instead of being swayed by the faces of the people. Those assigned to serve on the pulpit could definitely follow the admonishment given to Jeremiah, “Don’t look at their faces.” There would be one focus—The Presence of God.

The essential part music plays in most gatherings is an exhaustive subject in and of itself. Because so much can go wrong on any given Sunday, hearing the music should not be the reason to gather. From personal experience, I know the work involved in preparing music for the gathering. I also know how those preparations can seemingly flop when it is time to minister. On many occasions things do not go according to plan. When this happens, I am

forced to change and the song list we rehearsed quickly goes out the window....Perhaps with "your song" on it.

I must point out another important component of the gathering that cannot be overlooked. This is the function of audio (or sound). Most buildings where we gather do not have state-of-the-art sound systems. The systems are in desperate need of upgrade and/or qualified sound engineers. With these things working in tandem, there are so many potential problems like - noises from the speakers, instruments and singers with volumes too loud or too low, burst of loud volumes, speakers going in/out, broken or low quality microphones. I could go on, but that is for part 2. I will end this by saying, no matter how beautiful the edifice these issues can and will cause distractions for the singers, musicians and the saints gathered.

Yes, music is integral, but it is only a part of the gathering. When the music is not right, for whatever reason, do not half step in your Praise and Worship to your Savior. He is the focal point and most worthy to be Praised and Worshiped.

MY CHALLENGE - DON'T SPECTATE. PARTICIATE!

Do you know what you come to do? It is my observation that we have simply lost our purpose for gathering and we must gain it back. For centuries, even up to this current age, saints have endured persecution because they decided to follow Jesus. There are many

living in foreign lands that do not allow them to freely practice their faith in Jesus Christ. If they are caught practicing any religion other than the religion of that land, they will be jailed, persecuted and/or put to death. In some parts of the world, gatherings are underground. As United States citizens, we do not have these restrictions. We are living in a country that affords the opportunity to freely gather to worship Jesus. It is actually a normal occurrence to gather with saints- our community. No one is walking in the doors looking over their shoulders in fear. Some have said, "Well, we may not be able to worship freely in the days to come." This is even more reason to renew our minds and place the gathering to Praise and Worship our King at a higher level than we have.

This brings me to my challenge. When it is time to gather to Praise and Worship, focus on Jesus, your Lord and Savior rather than the people. Do not be distracted or a part of the distractions. Raise your praise high to the vertical direction. No matter what, no one or nothing is worth sacrificing the moment of Praise and Worship to Jesus. Forget about what has happened and what you may have to do when this time is over. Make a conscience decision that whatever you have to do is second in priority. Let nothing keep you from giving Him what He is most worthy of—Your body in full Adoration, Praise and Worship.

For the Singers and Musicians.

I have been serving in music ministry many years. In this time, I have experienced the best of days and the worst of days. This is a position that sometimes leave you scratching your head or scalp (*for the brothers without hair on their head!*) Unfortunately, music ministry in most churches have the most contention, confusion and misunderstanding by most, including those who are within that ministry. The "up front" function causes both celebration and criticism. It just goes with the responsibility. Some do not like your song selection and some criticize because you do not sound like the CD that has been tweaked and tweaked and tweaked some more to perfection. Most of our ministries are not honored to have the "professionals" so we work with what we have with all of our heart, soul and strength. The "up front" ministry of the music is a weighty responsibility and it is not to be taken lightly even when misunderstood by people on all levels.

I want to encourage every singer and musician to Stand and Study. Stand in your place of authority and Study, not only the craft of music, but the Word of God. Learn the power and honor God has placed upon not only music, but those chosen to carry out the task of ministering first and foremost before His presence. God is calling you and I back to the vertical place of honoring the One that called us. We may have been misunderstood, used and abused, but that was never the intention of the Lord. It was a path we had to walk down in order to come to know the God of the music. You could have compromised and taken your skill out of the house, but you hearkened to the conviction that was deep within. For that, the Lord will honor you. Look and seek for the honor and affirmation from the Father and once again pick up your instruments and/or sing your song to the One that gave you the gift of song and music. Perhaps you need to adjust your life to fully honor the Lord in order to be able to point people from the profane to the holy. Perhaps you have been promised many things, but disappointed when the promise became null and void. Forgive, get healed from the pain and move on. You may need to take some time away from the pressure of the pulpit (the stage) and regroup as you seek the plan and purpose of God for your life. For destiny sake... Do so. If the Lord calls you back to the forefront, the time away well spent with Him will give you the fortitude to Stand in the next phase as one that Stands by night and by day in the house of the Lord.

Be Blessed My Fellow Musician and Singer

If this newsletter has been an Encouragement to you, please let me know by e-mailing me at - **The _ EPlace@yahoo.com**. I would love to hear from you. Also, this newsletter along with other writings are available at **TheEncouragementPlace.com**.

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