

Warm-up

What types of warm-up exercises does a runner commonly do? What is the risk if they are skipped?

- ▶ My pattern (thoughts, actions) defines my path toward God.

Maximum Worship (vs. 1-2)

"Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary." (v. 1)

When I have to make a formal presentation to a planning commission I am careful to prepare. To step up the podium "cold turkey" would be foolish! I have a routine, a pattern to how I prepare so that I can maximize the effectiveness of this important time.

WORSHIP is primary in our relationship with God. He ordained it, and wants us to prepare for it. When I try to engage in worship without the right attitude, the right heart, I'm unable to effectively worship the Lord. Psalm 19:14 says, *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord my rock and my redeemer."* What I meditate on throughout the week, the pattern of my thoughts, affects my worship.

Jesus was clear about the connection between my mind and my words and actions. He said, *"The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart"* (Matt. 12:34). My heart is the "control center", and sends signals to my mind, resulting in words and actions (as in Psalm 91:14). *Where does your mind dwell?*

God calls worship "the (His) holy place" (v. 2). When I allow my mind and actions to be polluted I'm trampling mud into worship! I have a national parks lifetime permit, granting me unlimited access to the parks. What is your "entrance pass" to worship?

- ▶ *Make it a lifetime habit to pave the way to worship with godly thoughts and actions. Meditate on God's word!*

Backstage Pass (vs. 3)

"Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies"

Trisha and I went to see the play *Phantom of the Opera* in San Francisco many years ago. Because one of our friends was the sibling of a cast member we were given a backstage tour after the performance. We saw things that the average person in the theater could not see. Perhaps this is not a bad analogy of the Holy of Holies. It's a special place for worship, but you can only go there if you know Jesus Christ, who parted the curtain for you (see Matt. 27:51). Your guide is the Holy Spirit (see v. 8).

So, it's possible to be a Christian but stay in the courtyard or even the Holy Place, never allowing God to cleanse (sanctify) you and take you on a path to worship Him. And then there are those who consider themselves believers because they go through the motions, but don't know the Lord. Jesus said, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter"* (Matt. 7:21). I'm convinced that worshipping God "backstage", in His Holy of Holies, is doing the will of the Father.

- ▶ *How is God calling you to worship Him? Don't be surprised if it is a place where only His Spirit can lead you.*

Dress Code (vs. 4)

"Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise...." (Ps. 100:4).

"having a golden altar of incense..." (v. 4, referring to the Holy of Holies)

Our Christian society embraces many styles of worship today. Some are very formal and liturgical, while others seem to celebrate casual attire. When I was in Cambodia everyone in the worship service was barefooted, but the hearts were engaged in what I believe was pure worship. They were poor in worldly things but rich in spirit.

A note about the tabernacle: J. Vernon McGee referred to it as a "big gold box"; it was 15' wide x 45' long, with a curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. The *golden altar of incense* with the *Ark of the Covenant* and *mercy seat* were in this inner room, accessible only by the high priest once each year. When Christ died the curtain disappeared, granting us direct access to worship the Father through Him.

We are to be holy on the *inside*, and this should be reflected in our attitude of worship and in our speech and actions. When we praise God from *deep within our hearts* worship is guaranteed. Think of what you will place on the "golden altar of incense". What can you sacrifice to God that has value in His sight? (See group question #2.)

- ▶ *"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."* (Rom. 12:1)

Stay Focused (vs. 5-7)

"...but of these things we cannot now speak in detail." (v. 5)

Have you even been in a conversation with someone who took a long time to make their point? It's easy to get sidetracked with secondary issues and neglect what is most important. The writer of Hebrews is more concerned about what real worship *is* than about *how* to worship. You can read the details about the lampstand, showbread, and other elements in Exodus 26, so let's keep our focus on what worship *is*. It comes from the heart apart from external, man-made elements.

- ▶ *Don't get off the path to worship by focusing on the traditions of men or rituals or symbolism (see Col. 2:20-23). Rather, focus on the Lord Jesus Christ, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (Heb. 12:2).*

"Now when these things have been so prepared..." (v. 6)

Notice the need to prepare for worship. "Divine worship", that which is pleasing to God, is a continual process; it's my gift to God as in Rom. 12:1. If my thought life has an impure pattern it will inhibit my worship.

"...he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance." (v. 7)

God knows that I'll commit "unintentional sins" (in ignorance), so He made provision for this through Christ. Christ's sacrifice for my sins was not categorical or conditional. It does not depend on me; I can do nothing to earn it.

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18 NASB).

Entrance Pass (vs. 8-11)

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation" (v. 11).

I remember getting joy out of giving my kids something they wanted at no cost whatsoever to them. My love for them motivated me to give freely. When I heard their heartfelt "Thanks, Dad!" it pleased me. When I could see that their heart was tuned into pleasing me and learning from me that was all I needed.

There must be something in our adult human nature that wants to earn God's pleasure, tempting us to think it cannot truly be a free gift through Christ's sacrifice, death and resurrection. Think of the many religions in our world that focus on things we must do to get God's attention and receive His blessing. I saw this in Cambodia with the Buddhist and Hindu people worshipping their gods. They were misguided; their religion is futile, even if sincere.

The bottom line is that our human gifts and sacrifices are temporary, and inadequate. What can we give to a holy God that justifies His love for us? Man-made traditions are of no value, and cannot save us.

Don't be content to be on the outside looking in. If you know the Lord you have a free, lifetime entrance pass into His presence. There is no longer a veil in the way; there is nothing to hinder you from having an intimate relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ. If you're stuck on the outside because you haven't accepted God's pass, go for it! Allow Christ to bring you to God.

- ▶ *The only path to God the Father is through Jesus Christ the Son. When you possess this free pass you can truly worship Him. What are you waiting for?*

Group Discussion

1. What are some of the world's signals that try to interrupt or prevent you from truly worshipping the Father? What strategy can you use to tune out this static?
2. What sacrifice does Psalm 51:17 say pleases God? How can you give this to Him?
3. Franklin Covey is known for teaching people how to focus their time on "what matters most". How can you keep your priorities straight and *"present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God"* (Rom. 12:1)?

NEXT TIME: Lesson 5: WORSHIP / Posture – Hebrews 9:12-28