

Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. (*Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one*).

Prayer and Praises

Worship

There are three ways we respond to the Lamb of God. The first is worship.

God placed into the human heart a need for worship. Everyone worships someone or something. Even atheists, who claim there is no deity or higher power, worship something, be it their own accomplishments, money, job, or whatever.

What is worship? Webster offers several meanings, two of which are mentioned here. One is "extravagant respect or admiration for or devotion to an object of esteem; such as *worship* of the dollar." Unfortunately, too many people waste their God-given need on idol worship, which is worshipping anything but God. Another meaning, the one we will focus on today, is "reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power; *also*: an act of expressing such reverence."

What goes through your mind when you think about worship? Most Christians today think about our "praise and worship time" in church; a time when we sing praise songs and think about the love and awesomeness of God. This is a wonderful time, and I love it. But it is not what was envisioned by the writers of the scriptures.

In Biblical times, the most common form of worship was kneeling down and touching one's head to the ground, such as we see in Muslim worship. In some churches today you might occasionally see some individuals do this during the praise and worship time, but it is not common. The gesture seems to have negative connotations in our modern society. But in Biblical times it was the norm.

The first mention of people worshipping Jesus is in the story of a leper.

And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

Matthew 8:2 (NKJV)

Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached him and knelt before him. "Lord," the man said, "if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean."

Matthew 8:2 (NLT)

I use both of these translations because the NKJV uses the traditional, "came and worshiped Him," and the NLT correctly translates this as, "knelt before him." The leper saw Jesus, probably in the middle of the street, ran to him, and knelt down before him, bowing with his head touching the ground.

- *Why did the leper worship Jesus?*
- *Did he know who Jesus really was?*

Mark tells us the same story in Chapter 1, verse 40, but, unlike Matthew, Mark talks about Jesus' early ministry in the preceding verses. It doesn't take long for someone in a small community to make a name for himself when he does strange and amazing things like casting out evil spirits and healing people. As the word spread, more and more people who needed help sought out Jesus.

Jesus kept telling His disciples who He was, but, for the most part, they just didn't get it. The first mention of the disciples worshipping Jesus is in Matthew 14. It's the story of the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee when a storm hit and they were afraid for their lives. While fighting to keep the boat afloat they see Jesus walking toward them on top of the waves. Peter gets permission to join Him but begins to sink, and Jesus lifts him from the sea and helps him back into the boat. Then the disciples bow before Jesus and worship Him – for miraculously saving their lives.

So it is today. Unfortunately, too many come to Jesus because they hear of the miracles, or maybe because they were healed or experienced a miracle in their own lives. But if the miracles don't keep happening they lose faith because it doesn't seem to benefit them. The Bible tells us that Jesus had many disciples following him around, but many left because of hard teachings or hardships from following Him.

When Jesus was crucified most of the faithful who remained lost hope. Jesus tried to tell them that He must die, but that He would return. Still, they just didn't get it. After the crucifixion they hid, hoping they wouldn't get arrested and crucified as well. Friday night and all day Saturday they cowered behind locked doors, mourning the loss of the one they believed in and trusted, not knowing what to do next. Saturday was Sabbath, and not much was happening anyway. But Sunday morning the women decided to throw caution to the wind and expose

themselves to danger by properly preparing Jesus' body for burial. And, as we know, the tomb was empty.

Jesus resurrection changed everything. The disciples finally understood who Jesus was. During the time between his resurrection and ascension Jesus appeared to the disciples several times, breathed on them the Holy Spirit, (John 20:22), and gave them the Great Commission, (Matthew 28:16-20), to preach the Gospel, baptize and make disciples. After the resurrection the disciples never lost their awe of Jesus and never again doubted Who He was.

I believe that keeping the awe of Jesus will keep us ready to worship. When I first accepted Jesus as my savior, I was in awe of everything. Every word I read in the Bible suddenly had meaning. I loved Bible study. I hung onto every word the pastor preached. I was in awe of every miracle told in the Bible, wondering what it would be like to be in the presence in Jesus and witness miracles in person. But life can be overwhelming, and too often I am distracted by the "troubles of this world" and turn my focus on problems instead of miracles.

I have always felt Easter is the greatest Christian holiday, because it is our belief in the resurrection that makes us Christians. The first Easter after my conversion I arrived at church with great expectations. When I walked in people were walking around, talking and fellowshiping as usual. I had the urge to go to the first person in every pew and whisper in to their ear, "He is risen. Pass it on." I have since "come to my senses" and now enter church on Easter Sunday with a more casual attitude. But sometimes I wonder, where is the awe?

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." John 1:29. NKJV That phrase should cause our hearts to skip a beat.

Jesus laid down his life for His friends. Who are His friends? ...that is the world and us. That knowledge should bring awe to our spirits.

Paul never lost his awe of who Jesus is. He tells us in Corinthians;

If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

2 Corinthians 5:13-15 (NLT)

If we allow Christ's love to control us, if we bask in that love every moment of every day, we will not lose the awe of God.

- *How do we allow the troubles of this world overcome our awe of the Savior?*
- *How do we allow familiarity to do the same?*

- *How can we keep our awe of the Lamb of God, our Savior, the One who gave His life for the sins of the world, and that includes our sins, that we might have salvation and eternal life?*

Surrender

The second way we respond to the Lamb of God is through surrender. It's interesting that the word "surrender" is not found in the Bible. I have not read through every version, so it might be in one of them, but it is not in Strong's Concordance or in Unger's Bible Dictionary. Yet it is a spiritual principle and popular subject for books and sermons.

The dictionary definition of "surrender" that is appropriate for this discussion is: to give (oneself) up into the power of another, especially as a prisoner. Before we allow semantics to distract us, let's remember that Paul referred to himself as a "prisoner of Christ". He meant that he voluntarily gave himself to be a prisoner to Jesus, knowing that in Christ he would be safe, happy and fulfilled.

That's a pretty heavy thought for us modern, independent, free-thinking souls. We have all struggled to become self-sufficient and independent, making sure we are not controlled or manipulated by others. We have learned how to make our own decisions and lead responsible lives. These qualities ensure our survival in this crazy, demanding and ever changing world we live in. Where does the concept of surrender come in? Let's look at some Biblical perspective.

This is what the LORD says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow.

Isaiah 48:17 (NLT)

We have all been influenced, good or bad, by the many "teachers" in our lives; parents, siblings, friends school teachers, mentors, bosses, pastors, Sunday School teachers, just to name a few. God has used some of those people to teach us, but, just as children soon grow up to make their own decisions, we must grow up spiritually and learn to listen directly to God, letting God be our teacher rather than people.

- *Can we trust God with our lives. A wise pastor/friend of mine used to say that we won't obey someone we don't trust. What does God say?*

"What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator? Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, 'Stop, you're doing it wrong!' Does the pot exclaim, 'How clumsy can you be?'

Isaiah 45:9 (NLT)

My favorite Psalm is 139, and I would encourage every one of you to find time to read and study this Psalm. But verses 15 and 16 say; "You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born.

Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.”

God created us and watched us grow in our mother’s womb. Our creator already knows everything that will happen in our lives. How can we not trust the One who is great enough to create us, who knows our future? How often have we thought if we knew the future we could make better decisions? Well, our God knows our future and what we need to be our best. So we can be soft clay and surrender ourselves to God to mold and lead us, or we can be stubborn, hard clay and refuse to be molded.

Who do we follow? Jesus tells us in Mark 8:34 that: *“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

How can we do that? Paul tells us in Romans 12:2: Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (NLT)

- *Ask yourself, “am I soft clay that will let God mold me or am I hard and stubborn, wanting to do things my way?”*
- *Can we trust Jesus enough to deny our own desires and follow the principles of His life and teaching?*
- *How do we surrender to the Lamb of God?*

Sacrifice

The third way we respond to the Lamb of God is with sacrifice. Under the law in the Old Testament the people were required to sacrifice animals to God for the remission of sin. Jesus ended that law when He became the sacrificial lamb for the remission of the sins of the world. But that did not end our need to honor the Lamb with our sacrifices. So what kind of sacrifices can we bring?

I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the LORD.

Psalms 116:17 (NKJV)

“Thanksgiving isn’t a sacrifice,” you say. And you’re right, as long as all is right in our world. But what about the times our world falls apart - when we lose a loved one, when we have a fatal disease, when we are in pain, when someone we trusted betrays us, when we have lost hope? These are the times when we need to call upon the name of the Lord and, as an old song says, count our blessings.

In the movie “Soul Surfer,” a true story about a teenage girl who is striving to become a professional surfer when a shark attacks her and takes off her left arm, Bethany goes to her Sunday School teacher and asks, “How can this be God’s plan for my life. I have lost everything.” The teacher tells her that she has not lost everything because she still has her life, family that loves her, and a future that only God can see. No matter how bad our circumstances may be, there are always blessings to be thankful for. Bethany learned to surf again and became the professional surfer she dreamed about, and she touched the lives of many who were struggling to overcome disabilities.

the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: “Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever” and of those who will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD.

Jeremiah 33:11 (NKJV)

Just like thanksgiving, praise is easy when we feel good, when we’re in church with our church family in corporate worship, when our lives are in balance. But when life rocks our world, praise is a sacrifice. The best testimony I have heard about the sacrifice of praise is the testimony Sharon gives about her mother. I’ll ask her to give that now.

And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do.

1 Samuel 10:8 (KJV)

This verse is talking about the sacrifices of peace offerings, which is a little different than the sacrifice of peace, but in today’s world, with all the anger and violence that has almost become the norm, I believe it is appropriate to consider a sacrifice of peace. We have no control over peace between nations, or peace in cities, or peace in anyone other than ourselves. But we can project an attitude of peace, even in situations where others may be losing control.

Saint Francis of Assisi prayed, “*Make me an instrument of thy peace, oh Lord.*”

When friends are arguing do we take sides and join in the battle or do we try to be an instrument of peace? When a group of people becomes irate over something, be it a government action, an act of discrimination, or an act of horror such as a mother killing her infant by putting it in the microwave, do we join in with more comments of anger or can we become an instrument of peace?

- *What are some other circumstances where we can become part of the mob or become instruments of peace?*

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And do not be

conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

I believe that during this time of Lent, when we think about “giving up” something, this scripture can be a good guideline. Giving up candy or soda is good because they are destructive to our bodies, but this verse could be used to stimulate our imaginations to come up with some really creative ways to bring sacrifice to our Lenten experience.

- *Share, if you like, what you have chosen to do for Lent and why.*
- *Looking at Romans 12: 1,2, can you think of some other ways we could use this time of Lent to remember the sacrifice of the Lamb of God and honor Him?*