

“THE SEVEN LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS”

“First Things First: Worship”

Scripture Reading – John, 4:19-26

“Sir”, the woman said [to Jesus], “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem”.

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth”.

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us”.

Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he”.

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”
Revelation, 4:11, NIV

This series is based on the book ‘THE 7 LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS’.

Shortly after his seventieth birthday, Selwyn Hughes sat down to compile a list of the truths the Lord had taught him as he walked with Christ for more than half a century. This original list contained between forty to fifty issues which he felt could be passed on to the Christians of today and tomorrow. In asking what was absolutely essential to living an effective and successful Christian life, the writer whittled them down to an irreducible minimum of seven.

Selwyn Hughes decided to call these seven key concepts ‘LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS’. He considered ‘principles’, ‘beliefs’, ‘tenets’, ‘doctrines’, ‘convictions’, but decided on ‘LAWS’. However, this is not a call to legalism but a call to engage with the spiritual laws God has built into his Kingdom, which in turn enable us to experience more of his power and his presence.

An American publisher when asked the question, “WHAT SELLS?” replied, “ANYTHING WITH THE WORD ‘SUCCESS’ IN IT”. Everybody, especially in the realms of business, commerce or politics, wants to be successful. However, there is a great deal of difference between the way the world sees success and the way God sees it. One Bible College for many years had the motto: ‘TO BE IN GOD’S WILL IS BETTER THAN SUCCESS’. Years later, after a number of students debated the issue, it was changed to: ‘TO BE IN GOD’S WILL IS SUCCESS’.

Let the Holy Spirit unfold for you the basic laws that govern all spiritual success...

“FIRST THINGS FIRST: WORSHIP”

‘The first responsibility of every Christian is to worship God. It is, I believe, the first law of the soul. When we violate this law we put our souls in peril. Scripture bulges with the truth that God is to be the first and only object of our worship. From Genesis to Revelation the emphasis cannot be missed – God commands us to worship him.’

Selwyn Hughes

Bringing enjoyment to God, living for his pleasure, is the first purpose of your life.

‘When you fully understand this truth, you will never again have a problem with feeling insignificant. It proves your worth. If you are that important to God, and he considers you valuable enough to keep with him in eternity, what greater significance could you have? You are a child of God, and you bring pleasure to God like nothing else he has ever created.’

Rick Warren

Worship is to be our highest priority.

And anything you do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship. Worship is as natural as breathing; it is as natural as eating. The reason God made us with the desire to worship is that he himself desires us to worship him. If we fail to worship God we will always find a substitute.

‘The LORD is pleased only with those who worship him and trust his love.’

Psalms, 147:11, CEV

One of the oldest books in Scripture is THE BOOK OF JOB.

You know the story. Satan came before God and accused Job before the Almighty. Satan got to work and one day, out of the blue, tidings of disaster come crashing in upon Job. Hot on the heels of one another come the messengers of woe. The reports are devastating: his oxen and asses have gone, his sheep and camels are gone, his servants are gone, his children are gone. With a single stroke he is bereft of almost everything.

But consider the moral splendour of this: the patriarch, hearing the numbing news, falls down on the ground to worship God (see **Job, 1:20**).

How many modern-day followers of the Almighty would have done that?

1. DEFINING WORSHIP

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Worship is far more than what we do on a Sunday morning.

Worship is more than music and singing, praying, reading God’s Word, listening to a sermon, and giving in the offering. Worship is far more than a style – some prefer a contemporary style whilst others are more comfortable with traditional. There is no such thing as a worship song – worship has nothing to do with the style, volume, or speed of a song.

Christians often disagree in their choices for how they prefer to worship.

BUT NOTE THIS: There is no biblically mandated style for worship. Whilst we may prefer the old hymns to the contemporary melodies; or the New International Version to The Message; or a relaxed style as opposed to ritualistic liturgy... God loves all styles of worship, providing it is offered in spirit and in truth, it is an acceptable act of worship to God.

True worship can be defined as: 'THE ACT OF DECLARING TO GOD HIS WORTH, AFFIRMING WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE, AND RESPONDING TO HIM IN PRAISE, ADORATION, THANKSGIVING, AND AWE'.

WORSHIP IS AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE LIVING AND HOLY GOD

Consider Moses and the Burning Bush (see Exodus, 3:1-6).

“Do not come any closer”, God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground”.

Exodus, 3:5, NIV

At God's command, Moses removed his sandals and covered his face.

Taking off his shoes was an act of reverence, conveying his own unworthiness before God. God is our friend, but he is also Sovereign Lord. To approach him frivolously shows a lack of respect and sincerity. When you come to God in worship, you should not approach him casually. Although we are invited guests, we must recognise that we are in the presence of the King of Kings. We should come to him with an appropriate attitude.

WORSHIP RISES OR FALLS WITH OUR CONCEPT OF WHO GOD IS

How do you picture God? “I like to picture God as...”

How does the Bible picture God? “I would like to think this is how you see God!”

Worship must be based on the truth of Scripture not our opinions about God.

To worship in truth means to worship God as he is truly revealed in the Bible. If our God is too small; if our God is not allowed to be himself; if our God is not the God of the Bible then our God is not worthy of worship. If there is one terrible disease in the Church of Christ it is that we do not see God as great as he is. We must continually guard against the danger of becoming too familiar with him.

A W Tozer defined worship in a dogmatic way.

Worship means to feel in the heart – a person that merely goes through the form and does not feel anything is not worshipping.

Worship means to express in some appropriate manner what you feel – a humbling and delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder.

‘Worship is not just praising God but being in awe of him, adoring him – not for what he gives but for who he is. Strictly speaking, in worship there is no prayer or intercession. It is gazing upon God and adoring him just for himself.’

Selwyn Hughes

‘WORSHIP IS ALL THAT WE ARE RESPONDING TO ALL THAT HE IS’

2. DESIGNED WORSHIP

‘Long before he laid down earth’s foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.’

Ephesians, 1:4-6, Msg

DEEP WITHIN EVERY HEART IS A DESIRE TO WORSHIP GOD

This is because in the beginning God designed us for worship.

The primary purpose behind the creation of mankind was that we would freely and intelligently worship the Creator. Only when this truth is understood and practiced can our souls function the way God designed.

‘What is the chief end of man?’

‘The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever’ (Westminster Catechism).

God is not primarily in the business of recruiting labourers for his harvest field.

His chief aim is to restore fallen man to the condition that he can offer him true worship. One of our failures is the way we take converts and immediately set them working when we should teach them first to become worshippers and only after that become workers.

DEEP WITHIN EVERY HEART IS A DESIRE TO WORK FOR GOD

Our work for God is important, but our worship is urgent, it is vital.

It is tragic when we become more interested in our work for God than in God himself; or more taken up with the cause of Christ than the Christ whose cause we represent. Jesus was always able to distinguish between the urgent and the important, and we are fulfilled only when we place what is vital before that which is important.

We must learn to differentiate between the urgent and important and make the adoration and worship of God our life's number one priority.

Consider the story of Mary and Martha (see Luke, 10:38-42).

‘As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha”, the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her”.’

Notice that Jesus considered it better to prioritise worship over work, everytime!

Why is it that when we get too busy, the first thing we drop is worship, but we still do that work?

3. DOUBTFUL WORSHIP

In his book 'WORSHIPPING GOD' (which he subtitled: 'REDISCOVERING THE FULL DIMENSION OF WORSHIP'), RT Kendall gives three examples of doubtful worship. None of these actions can be said to be worshipping God 'IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH'.

WORSHIP IS DOUBTFUL WHEN IT IS EMOTIONAL

When we worship our goal should be to bring pleasure to God, not ourselves.

I have to admit that I get a little concerned when I receive the comment "I LOVED THE WORSHIP TODAY, I GOT A LOT OUT OF IT". Well, I am glad you did, but it was not good if God didn't love the worship and was pleased by it. The problem is, sometimes our good feelings and emotional highs come about because we like the songs and choruses we have sung. They have lifted up our emotions.

I am also concerned when someone says, "I DIDN'T GET ANYTHING OUT OF THAT TODAY, I DO NOT KNOW WHY I BOTHERED TO COME". I will tell you why you should come – it will bring pleasure to God if you worship him 'IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH'. The problem is that your motive for worship is selfish and it is wrong. Our true motive should be to bring glory and pleasure to our Creator.

True worship glorifies God and pleases him. We bring joy to his heart in worship!

WORSHIP IS DOUBTFUL WHEN IT IS ELITIST

In other words, when worship favours one group at the expense of another.

We can become too selfish in our worship. We like certain songs – and certain song books. We like certain styles of worship and not others. Some of us like good old-fashioned hymns whilst others like new modern contemporary worship songs and choruses. Some like a good old-fashioned and formal holiness or salvation meeting whilst others like a more relaxed homey style.

True worship glorifies God and pleases him. We bring joy to his heart in worship!

WORSHIP IS DOUBTFUL WHEN IT IS ENTERTAINMENT

Worship is not for the pleasure of people.

Any worship that seeks to amuse or entertain people is only a performance and that is to be despised. God wants us to use our talents, yes, but for his glory.

Why do people clap a rousing band march? Did they enjoy the music? Did they enjoy the band? When we find that we are concentrating upon the performer and admiring their virtuoso or talent, are we truly adoring God at that moment for who he is?

True worship glorifies God and pleases him. We bring joy to his heart in worship!

4. DYNAMIC WORSHIP

In helping to discover what dynamic worship involves, we consider three verses:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

Mark, 12:30, NIV

"God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."

John, 4:24, NIV

"With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him."

Romans, 12:1, JBP

DYNAMIC WORSHIP IS AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

When Jesus speaks about worshipping in the spirit he is not referring to The Holy Spirit but our own spirit. Worship must be genuine and heartfelt. It is not just a matter of saying the right words; you must mean what you say. God hates hypocrisy.

He does not want showmanship or pretence or phoniness in worship. He wants honest and real expressions of our love and devotion to him. God gave us deep emotions so that we could come to him with deep feeling – but these emotions must be genuine, not faked.

"I don't want your sacrifices – I want your love. I don't want your offerings – I want you to know me."

Hosea, 6:6, TLB

DYNAMIC WORSHIP IS CONFIDENT WORSHIP

You cannot truly worship God unless you trust him.

If we carry in our hearts any doubts about the goodness of God and allow these doubts to grow to a degree where they harden into a constant suspicion of God's goodness then we will be unable to worship, because it is not possible to worship a God we do not trust.

Christians are called to trust God especially when they cannot trace him, and to believe that whatever he allows (which we may well describe as bad) is part of a purpose which we cannot understand now but one day we will. Until that day dawns we must trust.

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Romans, 8:28, NIV

DYNAMIC WORSHIP IS THOUGHTFUL WORSHIP

Four times in Scripture, Jesus commands us to 'LOVE GOD WITH YOUR MIND'.

God is not pleased with thoughtless singing of hymns, perfunctory praying of clichés, or careless exclamations of 'HALLELUJAH!', because we cannot think of anything else to say. If worship is mindless, it is meaningless. You must engage your mind.

Jesus called thoughtless worship 'VAIN REPETITIONS'.

Try praising God without using the words praise, hallelujah, thanks, or amen. Instead of just saying, 'WE JUST WANT TO PRAISE YOU', why not make a list of synonyms and use fresh words like admire, respect, value, revere, honour, and appreciate.

'Jesus said, "Find a quiet secluded place so you won't be tempted to role play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God and you'll begin to sense his grace".'

Matthew, 6:6, Msg



DYNAMIC WORSHIP IS SACRIFICIAL WORSHIP

In worship we are to offer our bodies as 'LIVING SACRIFICES'.

Usually a sacrifice is to be considered as something dead, but God wants us to live for him! However, one problem with a living sacrifice is that it can crawl off the altar. We can sing 'I SURRENDER ALL' on Sunday, but then go 'ABSENT WITHOUT LEAVE' on Monday.

King David wanted to make a purchase to enable him to sacrifice to God.

Araunah offered to give what David required as a gift, but the king refused saying:

"No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.'

II Samuel 24:24b, NIV

Real worship costs.

One of the greatest condemnations God charged his people with through the prophet Malachi was the way they offered second-rate sacrifices and heartless and haphazard worship. God was definitely not pleased with their efforts, and made an amazing statement about such worship:

"Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you", says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands."

Malachi, 1:10, NIV

'Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength".'

Mark, 12:30, NIV

Jesus helps us to realise that God wants us to love him:

<u>PASSIONATELY</u>	<i>'With all my heart and with all my soul.'</i>
<u>THOUGHTFULLY</u>	<i>'With all my mind.'</i>
<u>PRACTICALLY</u>	<i>'With all my strength.'</i>

God does not have your affection until you love him with all your heart and soul.

God does not have your attention until you focus your mind solely upon him.

God does not have your ability until you give to him your body and strength



DYNAMIC WORSHIP IS LIVING WORSHIP

"Take your everyday ordinary life – your sleeping, your eating, your going to work, your walking around life and place it before God as an offering."

Romans, 12:1, Msg

Every activity can be an act of worship.

When you perform even the smallest task for the praise, glory, and pleasure of God it is worship. 'A DAIRYMAID CAN MILK COWS TO THE GLORY OF GOD', wrote **Martin Luther**. How is it possible? By doing everything as if you were doing it for Jesus and by carrying on a continual conversation with him while you do it. Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence.

'Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.'

I Corinthians, 10:31b, NIV

Application

'Worship is all that we are, responding to all that he is.'

True worship can be defined as: 'THE ACT OF DECLARING TO GOD HIS WORTH, AFFIRMING WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE, AND RESPONDING TO HIM IN PRAISE, ADORATION, THANKSGIVING, AND AWE'.

We must love God with all the power within us.

We must love God with fear and wonder and yearning and awe.

Matt Redman, a Christian songwriter and worship leader, tells how his pastor taught his church the real meaning of worship. To show that worship is more than music, the pastor banned all singing in their church for a period of time while they learned to worship God in other ways. By the end of that period, Matt Redman had written the song 'THE HEART OF WORSHIP':

*When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come;
Longing just to bring something that's of worth that will bless your heart.*

*King of endless worth, no one could express how much you deserve.
Though I'm weak and poor, all I have is yours, every single breath.*

*I'll bring you more than a song,
For a song in itself is not what you have required.
You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear; you're looking into my heart.*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship,
And it's all about you, all about you, Jesus.*

*I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,
When it's all about you, all about you, Jesus.*

Matt Redman, SOF: 1113