INTIMACY IN WORSHIP

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Intimacy - it's become a hot word in worship today around the world; it's almost a fad among people making worship recordings. But what is real intimacy that is not just a trend? At it's simplest, intimacy in worship means that we express our devotion, usually through singing to God.

WHERE CAN I GO AND MEET WITH GOD?

For some of us, singing intimate "first person'" songs to God has become very common, but if we look back a few years, we remember that it wasn't always so. For most of my life, I remember singing songs in church about God, or singing songs that were exhortations to live better. But what I was hungry for, even as a boy, was to communicate directly with my Maker. I wanted to sing to God. I wanted to reveal my heart to God and I wanted Him to reveal His heart to me. I can remember many times when the song leader would start "preaching" to me, trying to get me "into it." Inside I cried out, "Where can I go and meet with God?"

SINGING DIRECTLY TO GOD

In the summer of 85, I encountered corporate intimate worship for the first time at a John Wimber conference in Kansas City. The worship leader (Danny Daniels) simply stood up to the microphone and began to sing songs that helped me express my heart to God. It was so simple. And it was exactly what I was looking for. When John and Carol Wimber (founders of the Vineyard movement of churches) and others began meeting in a home in 1977 in California; they gathered because they were hungry to meet with God. Carol shares a bit what it was like and what they learned early on about intimacy: "I noticed times during the meeting, usually when we sang - in which I experienced God deeply. We sang many songs, but mostly songs about worship or testimonies from one Christian to another. But occasionally we sang personally and intimately to Jesus."

Those types of songs stirred and fed the hunger for God within me. People want to sing intimate songs to God because they say what their hearts have been yearning to say, and many of them have been longing for intimacy their whole lives. This expression of intimacy is filled with an expectation of God's presence; His heart revealed after we have revealed our heart to Him. This is real intimacy, a living relationship with God. What an incredible joy when we discover that He is longing for these intimate times as well. And so, we sing! God loves to draw near to us as we draw near to Him.

SINGING AND LIVING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Some people have asked me, "Do all intimate songs need to be slow and gentle in their musical style?" My answer is (with a chuckle), "No!" The music I use is chosen to encourage intimate dialogue and the opening of our hearts to God. I can think of a number of songs that are upbeat and intimate. However, I do point out that if you have a great difficulty with intimate love songs to God, (and many of them are slow in tempo), then you might have some difficulty hanging around me – because I love those type of songs and tend to use them when I lead worship at my church or make a recording.

If intimacy in the narrow sense means that we sing to God, then in the broad sense, intimacy means we live our whole lives in the presence of God. If we give ourselves away to other loves, to other gods, we will lose intimacy with God, or we will try and manufacture it in a way that is shallow and purely physical. This is an empty encounter for both God and us. We cannot spend our entire week in pursuit of the world, and then wonder why our worship on Sunday feels flat.

THE REAL THING

Real intimacy cannot be created by simply singing the right songs. Intimate worship really happens when the songs come as an overflow of a heart full of love. Real intimacy is like marriage, and it only works as we forsake all others. Intimacy is reverent, not flippantly casual. I believe that the more intimate something is, the more reverent it actually becomes. A husband and wife approach physical lovemaking on their wedding night with great reverence.

Intimacy in marriage is so powerful because it is so reverent. Without reverence, intimacy in marriage will most certainly die. Without reverence, we will not experience real intimacy in worship.

The Bible is full of accounts of intimate worship. As David looked after the sheep he sang intimate worship songs to the Lord. He continued to do the same when he became the king of Israel. The woman in Luke 7 worshipped intimately as she poured the perfume out on the feet of Jesus. When we embrace intimacy – real intimacy – in worship, we are fulfilling our destiny to be in a surrendered relationship with God. We sing to the Lord as Psalm 96:1 says, "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth."

Intimate worship will always be our highest calling and aim in this life, and then, when we pass on to the other side, it's only going to get better.

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