

“Worship”

GO: *You Have What It Takes- Part 2*

October 9, 2011

Andy Wirt (andy@clearviewgrace.com)

Introduction:

Last weekend was a special one. Trish and I enjoyed something we rarely do anymore—spending a whole 24 hour period by ourselves! It was wonderful. It was heavenly. We enjoyed time together. We watched movies without being interrupted by crying babies and sick kids. We slept in past 6:30a. for the first time in years on a Saturday...and this was especially wonderful after a full-nights sleep-which is unusual in our everyday lives. We ate out without having to occupy kids and keep them in their seats for over an hour.

What was so nice about this day together was that it was going back to what it once was. It took us back to our first years together before kids. It took us back to a time where we could focus on each other...really communicate...enjoy the gift that is just being together and connecting deeply.

Sometimes the most special things are discovered when we take the time to go back to the way something used to be.

Human love has a way of drifting. Whether it is time or work or kids or health problems or bills or some other pressure of life—love can drift between man and woman or between family members or in a friendship. Love can also drift because it takes work to maintain. Love takes discipline. It takes work when we don't feel like it. And, sometimes the work it takes to maintain real love is tough. Some of us don't want to do what is hard...so love begins to drift. If left to natural causes...love will die.

Sometimes to rekindle love *you have to go back to the way things were when you were first in love*. You have to make a special effort to remember how it was and do the things you did at first. This is true in life...*and it is also true spiritually*.

As Christ followers, our passion for Jesus can drift as well. The fires of our passion for God can die down. The embers are still there...there is still some heat coming off the coals...but the fire in our hearts for Jesus sometimes needs restoked...needs more air...needs more fuel. There are times where, spiritually, we have to go back to the way things were.

We have to go back to the time when we first understood Jesus' love. We have to go back to the time where we first understood what it means and how it feels to be forgiven. We have to go back to the time when we were first inspired by hope and realized that Jesus has freely established a place for us in eternity with Him.

We have to go back to a time when God was powerfully at work in our hearts and when we would be willing to do anything for Him...a time when spiritual passion flowed deeply in and OUT OF our hearts.

When we reach this point...we will be fully alive in Jesus and fully ready to be used for Him to reach others for Christ. We said last week that *Your most effective tool for evangelism is to be madly in love with Jesus*. I want to carry this theme on this week. Big Idea: **Words about Jesus will flow from our lips when worship of Jesus fills our hearts.**

Sounds simple, right? But, sometimes we miss it. Life gets in the way. We get tired. We get discouraged. We get sick. We get distracted... And before you know it- we've lost our spiritual vitality and when we lose our spiritual vitality...we've lost our best shot at being effective in sharing Jesus.

The danger here is this: This can happen to churches as well. See- churches are full of people...and if people can lose their spiritual vitality and their edge for effective evangelism...so can churches. And, the church missing this burning passion and love for Jesus isn't anything new. Look at what Jesus said to the church at Ephesus:

Revelation 2:1-7

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lamp stands:

² "I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. ³ You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

⁴ "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! ⁵ Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lamp stand from its place among the churches. ⁶ But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do.

⁷ "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

As we read how Jesus encourages and challenges the church at Ephesus, I believe there are things we can learn about how to love God deeply and be ready to serve Him vitally.

1. Jesus Is Watching (vv.1-2a)

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lamp stands:

² "I know all the things you do.

When we read about how Jesus interacts with the church at Ephesus, we see that Jesus looks at churches differently than we typically do from our individualistic American perspective.

Jesus sees individual behaviors as corporate actions. In other words, individual members fade into the background and He sees a single body. *This means that what one does affects the whole.* There is never any such thing as individual sin. There isn't any such thing as one person that is apathetic towards their spiritual development. If there is one complacent person in the family- that is going to affect the whole. There is always a greater impact.

Jesus scrutinizes and assesses His people. Jesus is visiting the church in Ephesus and He is inspecting it. It will be a thorough examination. *He will be evaluating whether it is the kind of church that is worth His connection.* For as we have already heard in the text-- He is willing to remove the lamp stand. He is willing to remove His Presence.

2. Jesus Sees Our Work (vv.2b-3, 6)

When Jesus looked down on Ephesus- what would He have seen?

Ephesus, itself, was an incredible place. It was a seaport and a major city. It had a theater that overlooked the harbor that could seat 25,000 people. In this theater, they had athletic games that rivaled the Olympic games in Greece. Ephesus was the center of worship for the Roman goddess Diana, the goddess of fertility and nature. The temple built in her honor was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

In the midst of this metropolis was a church. The church in Ephesus had quality leaders. It was founded by Aquila and Priscilla. We know that the apostle Paul spent quality time there. He sent Timothy to pastor there. Other coworkers of Paul, Onesiphorus and Tychichus, were sent to minister there. Ephesus had the best of the best serving the Lord in their midst. They had the "stars."

Great location, plenty of lost people to reach, great leaders-- you would think this would be a healthy church. And at first glance, they are. Jesus does commend them. They do have a lot right.

- They were not spectators. *I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance.* The Ephesian church was full of hard workers. The Greek word here speaks of sweat and exhaustion. This was an active church. This was not one of those places where 20% of the people do 80% of the ministry.
- They were patient in trying times. ³ *You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.* They were resolute. They were determined. They were faithful, even when times were hard. They kept going when the going got tough.

- They had doctrinal orthodoxy. *I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars.* The people in this church had a holy intolerance for doctrinal impurity. They had high standards, and they could sniff out the wolves among the sheep.
- Jesus also commended them for hating the teaching of the Nicolaitans. *6 But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do.* We are not sure what this group taught, but we suspect they taught that the way to win the battle over morals was to give yourself completely over to sin. The Ephesian church rejected it outright.

Now you put those commendations together, you have the kind of church that a pastor would give almost anything to have. Well, maybe...Because Jesus now reveals some things that don't pass His close inspection. The Ephesian Church was solid on many fronts...but was missing what was most important.

3. Jesus Sees Our Hearts (vv.4-5a)

4 "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! 5 Look how far you have fallen!"

This was a church that was losing ground. It was going two steps forward and three steps backward. Even though the Ephesian church was to be commended in some important areas—there was a concern that superseded these positive traits. *They had heart trouble.*

What we do for the Lord is important, but so is why we do it. It is clear that Jesus wants our hearts as well as our hands and heads. He wants it all. You see, this church was busy for God and even had strong teaching...but had lost its passion.

The Ephesian church had let the relationship with their Savior and Lord go. They had moved. And now they were going through the motions. What they had ended up with is religion, and not a vibrant relationship.

So Jesus helps the Ephesian church out. He points them back to what is most important. Back to what will be most fulfilling for them and back to what Jesus most wants out of us: ***our hearts- deeply in love with Him.***

4. Jesus Calls Us To Worship (vs.5b)

You don't love me or each other as you did at first!...Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lamp stand from its place among the churches.

Jesus issues a call to worship. Jesus turns their focus from religious activity to heart filled passion for God and His Word. Jesus challenges His followers to bring their hearts back to Him first...before their hands are busy working for Him. His main concern was *You don't love me...as you did at first!*

This is nothing new in Scripture. It is clear in other passages, as well, that God wants our hearts first.

Matthew 22:37-40

³⁷ Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

I love this passage because it boils down our Christian journey into two objectives. Jesus takes what we sometimes make too complex- what it means to follow Christ- and makes it simple. Really following Jesus means two things: 1) love God; and 2) love people. Love God and love people.

This is so important because it teaches us that love for people flows out of a love for God. It is only when we are fully in love with God, when our passion is burning brightly for Jesus, that we can truly overflow with love for people. Love for God is what opens our eyes to the needs of the people around us, it is what gives us motivation to love people when it is difficult, it is what pushes us to love people even when this means taking risks. Passion for God...genuine worship...is the fuel we need for effective mission.

Jesus knows this-- so He called the Ephesian Church to worship, as He does us today. **So-how do we worship? How do we make Jesus first in our lives- 24/7?**

- **We must return to our first love.** We must attend to the relationship. Following God is more than knowing stuff. It is more than doing stuff. It is more than showing up for church. It is first and foremost a relationship with Jesus, and if we don't take time to experience God in our daily life, we don't have anything.

Want to hear something really scary? I'm going to say something really bold. Please don't hear this as legalistic. I'm not trying to be a Pharisee and create another religious law for you to follow. *Please hear this in the context of this verse...this instruction from Jesus to turn back to Him.*

Here's my bold statement: ***I don't think God is going to powerfully work in your life...or work to the full extent of His power in our church...until you worship as a daily habit.***

In other words: I really believe that until you (and "we", collectively) are

the type of people that are reading our Bibles, really digging into Scripture, spending intimate, focused time in prayer with God, singing songs of adoration and celebration of God's goodness, making God the focus of our thoughts moment by moment, turning all of our resources over to Him...until we worship daily...we will not see His power flowing through our lives.

Friends- if you want to be on mission...if we want to see people's lives transformed through ClearView Church—the first step to take is to get a Bible reading plan. The next step to take is to find a time, and a place, and a plan to be quiet with God and speak to Him and listen to Him speak to your heart. The next thing after that is to find a worship CD that you love and to sing praises to God while you drive, while you wash dishes, while you bathe the kids, while you clean out the garage, while you exercise... After that, grab a journal and begin to write down key Scriptures and how God is speaking to you through them. Write down prayer requests and record God's answers. Start talking about what God is teaching you with some Christian brothers and sisters. Hear what God is doing in their hearts. Pray, out loud, with others... **Before you know it...because the things of God are on your heart...because thoughts of Jesus are filling your heart...WORDS ABOUT JESUS WILL BEGIN FLOWING FROM YOUR LIPS.**

I read this about worship this week. I like it:

To Worship is:

To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God,

To feed the mind with the truth of God,

To purge the imagination by the beauty of God,

To open the heart to the love of God,

To devote the will to the purpose of God.

We must return to our first love...

- **We must repent from sin.** Second...Reject and remove what keeps you from Jesus. Jesus uses the word repent. In other words, if anything is keeping you from having a relationship with Jesus, get rid of it. If you are being held back, it's time to let go. It is time to reject that which holds us back. *This is true as individuals and as a church.*

We can't really be serious about mission for Jesus when we are allowing issues in our own hearts from keeping us from Jesus. For the power of God to flow freely through us, we must be fully connected to Him. Sin creates blockages. Sin is an obstacle to God's power released in and through us.

What is holding you back? What are you holding onto? What is not fully submitted to Jesus?

These verses make it pretty clear what Jesus wants from us first. It isn't church attendance- although that is important. It isn't service...although He does ask that of us. It isn't even being an ambassador...although that must be a function of every Christ-follower. What is most important to Jesus is a repentant heart:

Psalm 51:16-18

¹⁶ *You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.*

You do not want a burnt offering.

¹⁷ *The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.*

You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

We must return to our first love and we must repent from sin.

- **We must do the things we did at first.** Then Jesus says to do the things you did at first. Think about it- *what are the things you do when you first fall in love? What characterizes love when it is new?*

You love to talk TO your beloved. When I first fell in love with Trish...and still to this day...I love to talk to her because I want to connect with her heart.

We've got to talk to God. Individually... and corporately... collectively together. PRAYER must be one of our main focus' when we are together.

Do the things you did at first. I have to admit...I've gotten thrown off here. I remember when we first started meeting as a spiritual family in this building. Each service, we tried to work in some way that focused on corporate prayer. We would have people pray individually, together. We would have people get in small groups and pray together. We'd have people stand up from where they were and pray a request or offer a praise to God. As we grew a little bit... I heard from some people *"Well...praying out loud really makes some people feel uncomfortable. Maybe that isn't the most welcoming things for guests..."*

You know what- I listened to the whiners. *We need to pray together. And, if we're uncomfortable praying together... we've got some work to do. We've got some growing to do... because you are never going to pray with someone in a risky situation if you can't pray with them in a safe environment like your church family.*

When we are in love with Jesus, prayer is a treat...not a challenge.

You love to talk ABOUT your beloved. When Trish and I first met, I loved to talk to others about her. I loved to share how “smoking hot” she was/is... how much I enjoyed spending time with her...how much I loved her care-free personality... I enjoyed sharing with others how happy I was to be with her.

The same must be true with us about our relationship with Jesus. Spiritual conversations should be the norm! We should be sharing how God is answering prayers in our lives. We should be sharing what we are learning in the Word. We should be talking about how we are seeing God’s greatness and power that day.

Why is this so difficult? It shouldn’t be. It should be the norm. I was with a good friend this week. We talked about life. We talked about ministry. Towards the end, I thought—I’ve got to ask him about his spiritual journey right now... that should be a main topic of conversation. I did... it was a turning point in the discussion. I’m glad I did.

There are all kinds of opportunities to do this. This week I was riding with a bus driver and I shared how in awe I am of God at this time of year because of the colors and temperatures, etc. I said, “God has given us such a wonderful day!”. Later that day... he came to me and he said, “You were right, God really gave us a wonderful day!” ☺

When we are in love...we talk about our beloved.

Illustration: When I met Trish... I was dating someone else. Know how she knew it wouldn’t last: *She never heard me talk about my girlfriend.*

Learning to really worship is important—because there is something major at stake here—the presence and blessing of Christ in the church. There is a warning in this text in Revelation. If we don’t get back to our first love, Jesus says’ “I’ll be gone.” I don’t view this as a threat. Instead, I think this is a statement of the logical consequences when a love for God is lacking in the midst of the church.

Do you know that in America eight churches close their doors every day? Isn’t that a startling statistic? You see, a church can have all kinds of structure, beautiful buildings and smooth organization, but no power. A church can have all kinds of history, but no future.

I don’t just want to create momentum around a move... I want to see momentum because God is working in our hearts. When a group of people is in love with Jesus and their work and priorities are built off of a foundation of worship- powerful things can happen. The Holy Spirit is free to work in and through us. Words about God will flow from us because thoughts of God fill our hearts. People will see Jesus in us, be attracted to His love and peace, and ClearView will grow through worship.

For this to happen, it has nothing to do with what we do on Sunday mornings. We don't need Chris Tomlin to be leading worship to grow. We don't need a worship band rockin' the house to be relevant to people. These things are great—but what is so much more important is *what is God doing in our hearts?*

Worship is a 24/7 pursuit. It is a joyful discipline of our hearts. It takes place moment by moment throughout the day. We worship as we encounter God in His Scriptures. We worship when we praise God and bring our needs to God in prayer. We worship when we love our spouse and do homework with our kids. We worship while we work hard and display integrity in the workplace. We worship when we notice the incredible sunrise and discuss God's power and creativity with a co-worker. We worship when we notice a neighbor hurting and we give a hug and say a prayer with them. We worship when we look around us during the day and ask God who He would have us share His love with.