

# The Experience of Worship

Lea Collins

The setting is rich pastureland of slightly rolling hills; a few trees dot the landscape. Grazing sheep are contentedly sprawled out a mile or so in every direction, filling the vale with the constant dull hum of their bleating. The air smells fresh, clean. A young teenage boy sits at the top of a small hill, almost lost among the sheep. He looks like I picture Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn, eyes filled with big dreams and a mischievous craving for adventure. While the sheep are his responsibility and he cares for them well, it's a rare time when he isn't lost in imagination.

When he isn't playing with the sheep or running around the fields, he's sitting under his tree, dreaming the adventures he's sure await him somewhere, sometime. Music and poetry are the language of this boy's soul, thus his dreams often become songs. There aren't always words. Sometimes he plays the song of the sheep, or the song of the creek, or the story of the bear attack he fended off. He doesn't play because he was told to – most of the time no one else is even around. He plays because there is music in him, because it *is* him.

The boy is David, a personal hero for many of us. David became a very powerful and important man but he never lost what he learned as a teenager out with his sheep. Somehow, between the days outside alone and his unhindered hours of musical revelry, young David met God. He didn't only know *about* Him but he knew *HIM*, as few people have since. Understanding the character of God and what brings Him pleasure the way David did gave him tremendous insight into worship, insight that has set the tone for worship in Jewish and Christian communities ever since.

What really strikes me is the naturalness of it. That boy in the hills with his homemade instruments didn't play because it was required, or because that's what people did, or because he couldn't think of anything else to do. He did it because it was natural for him, because it was in his heart, because it was who he was. What came out was always completely honest – nothing feigned, nothing forced. Sometimes it was reflective. Sometimes it was exultant. Sometimes it was ugly, angry and depressing. It all came out in his worship, which we have record of in the Psalms. Wherever he was, whatever he had, whatever he saw, whatever he did, he brought it to God in music, the expression that was most natural to him.

There's a key in that for us. We spend so much time trying to discern what new and difficult thing we can do for God, what tough choice and painful sacrifice might bring Him the greatest glory and do the most to advance the kingdom. Yet so often God is waiting and longing for us to do the easiest, most natural things we can do. We know that obedience is better than sacrifice but we often expect obedience to be as painful and hard and unnatural as the sacrifices.

One of my favorite quotes is from Eric Liddel, the Olympic gold medalist on whom the movie *Chariots of Fire* is based. In a newspaper interview, he said "God made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure." That makes it seem so simple. So practical. So attainable. The deep, secret truth is that it really is.

This is worship: to do what we were created for, to be who we really are and share that experience with God. Living lifestyles of worship involves not only learning who God is and what makes Him happy but also learning who God has made us to be and being that as strongly and fully as we can. Sometimes it leads us to hard places where every ounce of our character is tested and strained to the max. Sometimes it brings us to fiery places where we are completely turned inside out and disoriented with no idea who we are anymore. But sometimes it isn't hard or painful at all. Sometimes it's as simple as sitting on a hill making up songs when nobody is listening, just because there's music in our heart.

EXPERIENCE WORSHIP

What is the song in your soul? What makes you radiate with life? God put that in you and He desperately wants you to turn that back out as worship.

Play your music. Write your songs. Run as fast as you can. When you do, you'll feel His pleasure. And that is an experience of worship.

**EXPERIENCE WORSHIP**