

# WORSHIP: A SEXUAL ENCOUNTER

## *This Is An Adult Website, Right?*

Not “adult” in the manner that just leaped to mind. No, adult in that it is read primarily by adults. Stay with me. Even though the title of this article may breed (no pun intended) concern, I think you will agree with the metaphor.

I want to highlight a few experiences in my 25 year walk with Jesus that form the framework for my understanding of worship, which will always be one of three necessary parameters of ministry for me. Word of Jesus, Works of Jesus and Worship of Jesus determine whether any particular activity, event or encounter warrants my involvement or the involvement of the church I pastor. If the event or idea is not directly related to Word, Works & Worship of Jesus, then whatever it is that’s vying for me and my resources (time-people-money), the answer will be “No.” Not “no” as if it’s bad or wrong; just “no” in that it will not get my involvement. It will have to be done somewhere else by someone else.

## *What Is Worship? Is It A Noun? A Verb?*

Dr. Keith Keeran, now President of Kentucky Christian University, was my mentor and favorite professor. No matter what he was teaching, I enrolled. During my senior year, he taught a remarkable class on 1 & 2 Corinthians. As you may know, the Corinthian church was an incredible church filled with both spirit and flesh. As he categorically addressed the problems of the Corinthian church in light of the American church, we eventually came to the topic of worship, as did the Apostle Paul.

On a typical day and in typical fashion, I sat off to the left on an aisle seat so I could leave the class as quick as possible and beat everyone else to the lunch line. On this day, notebook open with the day’s date freshly written, Dr. Keeran said, “I want to address the topic of worship from a sexual perspective.” It stunned me. What? I replayed his statement in a nanosecond then watched every head; mine included, look up with such force, such quickness, that certainly a chiropractor would be busied for weeks from this moment alone. This was Bible College. We didn’t talk about sex; we only dreamed about it and then left it alone, never to be discussed. It was King of all Desired Discussions that prophetically would never come to pass. Wow, today was going to be historical. I put my pen down and fixed my gaze upon Dr. Keeran. I couldn’t take notes; today was shaping up as a day where I might actually learn something significant. I knew that night, as I popped in a pinch of Copenhagen with “the Fellas,” I was going to talk taboo. I would surely be able to teach these guys something applicable, beautiful and Biblical (education’s “Big 3”). This was a dream come true.

The lecture wasn’t what I expected. I honestly thought it would be hormonally charged with premarital angst building us to a moment of sexual understanding, a “moment of clarity” as my 12-step friends often wax. As good as that sounded to a 20 year old senior, what I got that day was far more significant. Not yet married, I received understanding about God and intimacy that day that still deposits its wisdom in me with regularity. I’m sure I missed a lot because the metaphor was not fully understandable to me at that point in my life. Now that I more fully understand, I wish I could go back and hear it again. However, because the Spirit of God teaches me all things, going back isn’t as necessary as I thought. He still takes me back to that place in scripture and to that classroom where I got as much education in 45 minutes as I’ve had to date...and I’ve had a lot of education.

## *Worship Is Both Spiritually & Physically Gratifying*

“God NEVER meant for you to do anything alone,” Dr. Keeran began. I knew what application I was drawing. And, by the looks of many classmates, they were experiencing the appropriate guilt and condemnation as well. That wasn’t what Dr. Keeran was referring to although my misapplication was certainly true.

What he went on to explain was how disconnected we are from God; how easy it is to allow your walk with God to become a personal discipline, and by personal, he meant alone. Your devotional life could be done without God. You could become so adept at studying the Word and what others said about the Word that you rarely encounter God’s wisdom or revelation in your quiet time.

---

## **Worship Is Both Spiritually & Physically Gratifying (cont'd)**

I don't know what was said for a while after that because he lost me. I got lost, not through lack of understanding. I got lost by completely understanding what he said. I got up every morning, early, to do my quiet time. I journaled. I went to chapel all the time. I only read Christian books and listened only to Christian music (OK, I digressed on occasion, when no one was around, so I could receive rhythmic solitude courtesy of Mic Jagger and the Stones...almost a spiritual experience in and of itself). But Dr. Keeran was right; my encounter with God had become auto-theological. What was purposed to be an intimate encounter between me and Him had been replaced by just me. God was on the outside of rote, rigid discipline of spiritual, ahem, "progress."

"Your relationship with God can only be intimate if it involves you and Him; not just you," he went on to say. "That's the nature of worship, a personal, intimate encounter with the Lord, both spiritual and physical. Any animal can engage in sex; but humans were created for it to be both physical and spiritual...an act of worship." By the time I reached my dorm room that night, the thought of dipping some snuff and discussing God as sexual being had vanished. Instead, me and a few of the Fellas opened up to each other about the very thing Dr. Keeran parlayed to me that day. I came to my most clear understanding of worship to date in that classroom back in 1984. Real worship is both spiritually and physically gratifying.

## **Worship Is Personal: Don't Let Anyone Tell You How To Kiss Your Wife**

I don't recall when this phrase became part of my definition of worship, but it has remained as an important graphic illustration to me for at least 15 years. Personal expression is just that-personal. Do you kiss with your eyes open or closed? Is it a peck or "really involved?" Are your bodies entwined or simply next to each other? It depends! It depends on the context of the worship encounter in which I'm engaged. What? You didn't think I was talking about worship? Dude, get your mind out of the gutter.

When it's just me and God, there are no parameters. I express myself, intimately in any manner I want. Remember, it's just me and Him, there are neither onlookers nor are there any hidden cameras filming the next installment of "Preachers Gone Wild." So, I do what I want, how I want and you should too. What's between you and your intimate partner (God or wife) is between you two. I love God and express my love in a way that's me and so does He. He may express His love to you in a manner that's between you and Him, and I hope He does. God is not a cookie cutter; look at the stars, the mountains, the people. He has enough creativity to express Himself in a way that is uniquely yours (between you and Him). It doesn't get any more personal than that.

My wife and I have dozens of love caveats that are unique between us and no one else. What are they? None of your business. Neither is the shared expression between you and Jesus. The reason I don't ask is because it is none of my business. What you and He experience in the privacy of your love relationship is for you and Him alone. End of story. I'm not going to let you dictate the details of how to love my wife; therefore, I will never let you dictate how I express my passion for God. That is a private matter!

## **Worship Is Public: Be Aware Of How You Kiss Your Wife Around Others**

How you love your wife has both private and public implications. You can drop to the floor and start mugging on her in the coffee aisle at Wal-Mart but don't expect to shop there again. The Corinthians were having trouble discerning between personal and public intimacy with God. Hippies had the same problem with sex in the late sixties. They had adopted the publicly scorned sexual philosophy of "anytime, anywhere, anyway with anyone and everyone." If you had a problem with this, then you were "square" or simply, "not with it." This worked very well for them until they had kids; suddenly, an entire new set of sexual rules arose.

Worship is the same. When Paul is teaching the Corinthians the difference between private romance with God (tongues) and public expression of His love (prophecy) note these factors:

- 1) He doesn't "forbid" their private expression; he encourages them to keep it private
- 2) He doesn't mandate their public expression, he encourages them to be orderly and beneficial to all (the whole public Body)
- 3) He separates the two by using the phrase "but in the church." Look at 1Cor 14 and separate his definitions of private acts of worship with the more suitable public ones. Note how he says things like "I don't forbid anyone..." followed with "but in the church...": Paul is very helpful but not definitional. He's not telling us how to kiss our wife; he is telling us how to be Christ-like in both private and public expression.
- 4) He implores our motive to be LOVE. That's why his treatise on the expression of gifts in Chapters 12 and 14 are centered by Chapter 13...the LOVE chapter. It makes perfect sense. Without love, tongues are just noise and prophecy is self-serving. Uh, just like sex. Without love, it is just a physical act, reminiscent of dogs in spring. But when it involves two people physically and spiritually passionate for each other, there is nothing better this side of Heaven, which may give insight into what Heaven, as an experience, might be like.

---

## **Worship Is Public: Be Aware Of How You Kiss Your Wife Around Others (cont'd)**

When worship is public, be gentle and patient in the cultivation of corporate intimacy. Your church may be heading too quickly in a direction that violates the conscience of another brother or sister. You can't hold back love so don't attempt to revert back to the old way, that may violate the consciences of those desiring new and different public displays of their affection toward God.

So what do you do? The same thing you did when a dating relationship wasn't working. You ignore them until they go away! No, just kidding. You do what a Godly man or woman would do. You explain that this body of believers may be heading in a direction that is unsettling to the one experiencing ecclesiastical discomfort, and then help them find a mate (church) more in step with their desired experience. Remember, a single church does not fully define God's manner of loving all people. That's why there is a Kingdom made up of many, many different expressions of His passion (churches). Help the brother or sister find a new expression. Introduce them to the other church and follow up on them a few months later.

How many times does a married couple reflect back with gratitude on the one that introduced them to each other? Helping others find the right place for public worship carries the same sentiment among believers. "Thanks for suggesting that church; I've found my home." Powerful!

## **If It Is Uncomfortable At First, Don't Push It**

The first time I ever raised my hands in worship was at Praise Gathering '88 in Indianapolis. The movement was slow but intentional. While there were 10,000 others at this gathering, the only person I knew was one of my best friends standing beside me. My first "big move" was to simply pull my traditional worship-driven hands out of my pocket. An hour and a half later, as Jessy [sic] Dixon was leading us in "He's Been Resurrected," my hands were fully extended toward Heaven. I was lost in love with God and would never again be the same. No one ever forgets their first time. Mine was pure magic.

My friend didn't grab my hands and lift them for me; he simply let me migrate toward my new passion in a way that was comfortable to me. He led me by example and with encouragement and patience. I moved forward at my speed with parameters appropriate to the occasion.

Honeymoons are both necessary and scary. Rarely are they the glorified climax of passion books and movies so often depict. They can be filled with fear, uncertainty and pain. The same is true when you decide to take your public expression of God to a new place. Don't rush, but rest in this principle: pressing through this fear is necessary if you want to keep your relationship with Jesus growing and vibrant. Any relationship, be it personal, sexual or spiritual, will become stagnant without continual growth in the expression of passion.

Now, when I think of how fearful I was about raising my hands in worship, I almost laugh out loud. I raise my hands all the time, not just in church, but at the stoplight too. When Crowder is belting out "You make all things glorious" my hands are in the air, even if I'm driving. Yes, worship, like sex, can be dangerous if you're not careful. ☺

## **Once You Cross The Line Of Intimacy, Nothing Will Ever Be The Same**

The reason I'll never forget that day in Corinthians class or that defining moment at Praise Gathering '88 is simple: I can't. When you cross the realm of intimacy, you can never go back. You can ignore the effects or attempt to disassociate yourself from the experience, but you can never, ever forget it. And I never want to.

As I continued to release my fear of embarrassment due to my lack of experience, God kept leading me on. Today's new expressions, too numerous to name, became tomorrow's norm. I desire more intimacy both privately and publicly. What nuances I desire privately with God aren't your business, remember? But what I want to experience publicly requires my commitment beyond what I'm afraid of: public scrutiny. Do I want to strip then dance wildly in front of my church? No! Well, maybe. Anyway, what I mean is that my public growth as a worshiper, a lover of God, shouldn't violate the order and acceptability of the body with whom I fellowship. Are we to stretch as a Body? Are we to continue moving toward a closer intimacy with God as a worshipping Body? Yes. Are we to publicly pressure people to a place of comfort and fit not yet experienced in privacy? No. Let's be intentionally progressive and pastorally patient. Don't let individuals determine the temperature of our corporate worship but don't force the corporate experience on the individuals too quickly. As Paul instructed, let's be mindful of one another.

## **You Will Become A Better Lover Over Time**

If I never raise my hands again in worship, I will never forget that first moment. Even though I still struggle with making my quiet time personal rather than rote discipline, I have a long-standing revelation from Corinthians class that properly frames my intimacy with God in an understandable metaphor that still speaks to me decades later. I am not the same, nor do I want to be. My hope is that I presently experience new, defining moments with God that I'll write about in another 20 years. I'll continue to explore and experience God in new ways and He will never cease to amaze me. By virtue of His patience and my intent to grow in my passion, God will continue to make me a better lover, like Jesus, the Lover of my soul. And you thought we were going to talk about sex...