

Making the Connection

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You're singing your heart out.

You're concentrating on the words.

You are there to worship, but are you...

Making the Connection?

It happens. You spent time with a "haven't-seen-you-in-a-long-time" friend and . . . well . . . nothing happened. In spite of your best intentions, you didn't communicate, you didn't connect. It's not uncommon. People talk to each other every day, often without ever connecting meaningfully.

Then, sometimes, at some deeper level, you and another person touch. As hard as it is to put such a connection into words, you know it happened. You communicated with another soul.

Similarly, if believers are going to worship genuinely, we need to "connect" with God. Since worship is the communication between two lovers, we must make this connection. We don't need any particular emotional charge, but we do need to connect with another person—a divine Person—in worship.

Many Christians have had this experience in worship with God, but they have had it accidentally. They know they connected—enjoying a personal "touch" from God—but they have little idea how it happened. Thus, they are frustrated as they try to regain that feeling of "connectedness."

The Woman Who Connected

We can learn something about making this worship connection from a woman who had a short, personal visit with Jesus—a woman who apparently connected. The account is found in Luke 7:36-50.

Did this woman "connect" with Jesus? Certainly! She was forgiven and she knew it; she was at peace and she knew it (see 7:48-50). What went in to the woman's approach to Jesus that resulted in her making the connection we long for? We can't reduce it to some automatic steps; but there are some key ingredients to be discovered.

An Intentional Connection

First, her meeting with Jesus is planned, not accidental. The woman was intentional. She learned that Jesus was at Simon's house and set out, in deliberate fashion, to meet with Him.

We often act as if "connection" in worship happens by accident. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't; and we have no idea why.

At times Jesus does surprise us with the gracious gift of His touch-the Gospels contain accounts where people had intimate meetings with Him they had not planned. Every saint has times when he or she has a meaningful encounter with God that they did not plan. But, if we long for regular, intimate time with God in worship, we need to plan to meet with Him.

All too often I have come into a "worship service" with no real intention to meet with the Lord. I came because of habit, or peer pressure, or because I had a part in the service. Going through the motions of worship, I wondered, "Why is God not here?"

The problem was that I had not really intended to meet with Him! I may have been intentional about being at the service, but I was not intentional about meeting with God.

God has said, "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all of your heart" (Jer. 29:13; NASV).

We can find Him in worship. He is still the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). But worship that connects with God is planned, not accidental.

This may mean that I will have to prepare my heart (and not just my clothes) in getting ready for worship. I will have to come to times of worship as if I really intended to meet with My Lord and Savior.

An Individual Connection

The second notable thing about this woman's approach in reaching Jesus is that it was personal, not generic. She did not approach Him in the way others might have. Her approach was appropriate for her. She used her hair, her tears, her body, to express her love (see 7:38). It would not have been fitting for Simon; but for her it was worship.

We tend to think that those deep and personal times of worship will happen if we just do what everyone else is doing. We wrongly figure "if it worked for them, it will work for me."

In the novel *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Christian seeks the love of Roxanne. A handsome man, Christian is feeble in speech. He enlists the aid of Cyrano, an unattractive comrade-in-arms who has a wonderful way with words, to write letters for him to Roxanne. Cyrano, being deeply in love with Roxanne himself, writes eloquently. Roxanne ultimately falls in love with the writer of the letters, not with Christian.

Christian had a problem; he tried to woo Roxanne with another man's words. This is what many saints do in worship. We take the expressions of another-in prayer, in song, in message-and try to use these to express our love to God. But, it doesn't work. If I am going to connect with God, then I will have to make the worship service a personal expression of my heart. On occasion, I have gone through a worship service mouthing the words to the songs, affirming with weak "Amen's" the message, and bowing no more than my head at prayer, only to leave feeling no closeness with God. But the problem wasn't with the songs, the message, or the prayers-the problem was that they had not become my expression of worship.

This does not mean we must abandon familiar songs or prayers in worship. But we must take to heart what we are doing and make it a genuine expression of our own love for God. I can use the words of others as long as these expressions come from my heart. To connect with God, the worship must be personal, not generic.

I may need to take those quiet moments that occur in any worship service and express to God, in my own words, what is on my heart. I may have to pray the words of a song, rather than just being carried along by the melody. I will have to make the expressions of worship my own.

A Passionate Connection

Note also that this woman's approach to Jesus is passionate, not restrained. This is no half-hearted overture; she holds nothing back as she expresses her feelings for the Lord. Look at the uninhibited way she communicates her love (7:44-47).

We are often more concerned with what others will think of us than whether we are adequately expressing our love for God. We lose sight of Jesus, looking at one another. We express ourselves tentatively, worshipping without passion.

We cannot yield to an "everyone for themselves" individualism in corporate worship; we must refrain from doing anything in a worship service that would put a stumbling block before another. But there is a difference between expressing oneself to draw attention to oneself, and expressing oneself in passionate, sincere worship before God.

All too often I have found myself "coming up short" in a worship service. I hold back from being moved passionately. I may start to feel a little teary-eyed, and so I "pull myself together." What might others think if I was to begin to cry during worship?

But what would Jesus want? He said: "You shall 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; NASV)

Could we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and express this love without passion? No! This woman knew this. She was expressing her love for Jesus with all that was in her. If my worship is to help me connect with God, it will have to be worship that is passionate, not restrained.

This may mean that I will have to take my eyes off others and focus on rightly expressing my heart to the Lover of my soul. To express myself in worship with passion, I will have to make Him the priority.

A Priceless Connection

The last observation to be made about this woman and her approach to Jesus is that it is precious, not cheap. Taking this approach to Jesus was not easy; it cost her something.

There was the material cost of the perfume. There was cost in time as she arranged to meet with Him. There must also have been an emotional cost—a risk—for her. She was known; Simon knew who, and what, she was. By doing what she did, she opened herself up for ridicule and rebuke. Her worship was costly.

Sadly, there is an attitude that worship is something that happens to us, rather than something we enter into—sometimes through a costly expenditure of time or effort. The thinking seems to be "I gave my (obligatory) offering when the plate came by, isn't that enough to cover the cost of worship?"

It used to trouble me that God, at times, refused to accept worship from His people. He told them to stop bringing offerings. In Malachi 1:10, we read: "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindly fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you." Why does God refuse what He first initially required? Malachi 1:6-8 tells us: The worshipers were bringing "just any old thing" in worship. They brought the lame, the worthless, the leftovers. God was being dishonored by the attitude reflected in their offering, so He told them to stop. Perhaps, if we want to connect with God in worship, our worship will end up costing us something. It might require rearranging a schedule to get to a regular worship service. It might even entail some emotional cost, as we risk what others might think in order to draw close to God.

Can we meet God in worship and know we have "connected"? I truly believe so. But, I think that for each of us it will be a little different. Our worship should be planned, but our plans may vary. Our worship will need to be personal, tailored to our own heart, and passionate, growing out of a loving heart. And it must be precious, extracting differing costs for each who draws near.

Let's follow the example of this un-named woman who had what every saint longs for—she had time with Jesus and was forever different because of it!