

Lessons from Desert Wandering – Worship

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Some years ago, I was training a new seasonal Ranger and I gave him some instructions about driving through one of the parks. I told him more than once to not drive all the way down a trail to the bottom because you won't get back up, even if you have four - wheel drive. Do you think he listened to me? After his training, he went to the park and since he didn't want to walk, he drove all the way down the trail. The vehicle was only a front wheel drive vehicle. He had to call for help and he had to be pulled out by a backhoe. He wanted to do his own thing. God has gifted us a free – will or human – will to be able to make choices. It was not God's intention for us to buck His guidance and His Will because of this human will we have. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, our will became tainted with original sin. That original sin holds our will at bondage. Our pride directs and guides many of the decisions we make. However, when we allow Jesus into our heart, His Spirit pushes that sin back and if we allow His Spirit to flow freely in us, His Spirit will guide and lead our human will. Paul tells us in Romans 7: 14 – 25, “¹⁴ So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶ But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

¹⁸ And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.^(a) I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. ²⁰ But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love God's law with all my heart. ²³ But there is another power^(b) within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. (NLT – Biblegateway)

So, because of Jesus Christ, His Spirit that lives within us helps us to want guidance and direction from God. We want to follow His law and we want help from Him to do His will because we know how weak we are. Paul sums this up very well in Galatians 5: 16 – 18, “¹⁶ So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. ¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. ¹⁸ But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. (NLT – Biblegateway)

This was the problem in the Old Testament, Israel wanted to follow God’s law at times, but had a hard time doing it. They usually failed. When God’s law shined light onto their sin, they had a hard time controlling their pride and they usually failed in following God. After the Son of God went to the cross, He paved a way for us to be able to live out God’s laws and be righteous at the same time and that is with the helper (Holy Spirit) Jesus sent to us at Pentecost. For the next few months, we’ll take some time and look at some of God’s laws in the Old Testament and see how they haven’t changed to our time period. His Spirit can help us live out even the Old Testament laws.

Let’s turn to Leviticus 9: 15 – 24 where we read this, “¹⁵ Then he presented the people’s offering and took the goat of the sin offering that was for the people and killed it and offered it as a sin offering, like the first one. ¹⁶ And he presented the burnt offering and offered it according to the rule. ¹⁷ And he presented the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning.

¹⁸ Then he killed the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings for the people. And Aaron’s sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar. ¹⁹ But the fat pieces of the ox and of the ram, the fat tail and that which covers the entrails and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver— ²⁰ they put the fat pieces on the breasts, and he burned the fat pieces on the altar, ²¹ but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved for a wave offering before the LORD, as Moses commanded.

²² Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. ²³ And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. ²⁴ And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and

the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (ESV – Biblegateway)

The Old Testament gives us a lot of guidance on worship. We live in an environment where the American Church of today does not know how to worship. God gives us guidance, which we'll look at here shortly, but our issue with worship is we have allowed our pride to get involved into worship. We want worship in our own way or we think worship should be done in a certain way. We also use worship as a marketing device to draw people into church. We have lost the art of worship and this been going on for many, many years. If only singing praise hymns would solve the problem of declining numbers in Church – it hasn't. Going back to singing hymns won't solve the problem either if we do it only because it solves our purpose or desires. What does God want from us? How does His Spirit want to lead us as we worship every Sunday? What is our motive for worship?

In Leviticus, we read how Aaron and his sons are preparing worship in their day. This is very different from our time. This was done in the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting. It was a tent that could be movable because Israel was in the wilderness. They had moved from one place to another and a permanent place would not be made until King Solomon comes along. So, Aaron and his sons are going through the steps of making offering for the sin of the people. The first thing we have to understand is that these procedures Aaron and his sons were going through was given by God Himself. In Leviticus 9: 6, "This is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you. (NIV)" God told them what He wanted for worship. When we worship, we have to understand we worship under the standards of God, not our standards. Jesus tells the woman at the well this in John 4: 23 – 24, "²³ But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. ²⁴ For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." (NLT – Biblegateway). Jesus, the Son of God, tells us that the Father is looking for those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Jesus isn't saying He is looking for those singing a certain type of Christian music. That is what we focus on, but God doesn't focus on that. He wants those who worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. Why is the Church of today having such a problem with this? Why are worship services so dead? You can have all the loud music you want and still have a dead service. Again, Jesus tells us that the Father is looking

for those who worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. Jesus is telling us that now His Spirit helps us to worship. The same Spirit that lives within us when we allow Jesus into our heart and mind. You may say that is different from the Old Testament and in some ways it is. However, there is one thing that hasn't changed and is still required today for worship. Let's go back to Leviticus for a moment. Aaron had to take a goat for the people's sin offering and slaughter it and offer it as sin offering for the people. We read about the separation of the fat and blood and how Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. Then Aaron stepped down from the altar. Then Moses and Aaron go into the tent of meeting and come out to bless the people and then and only then does the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people that were there (verse 23). Part of that offering was for the sin of the people. They could not see the glory of the Lord until their sin and guilt had been removed. The burnt offering was for total surrender. The grain offering was a freewill offering that the people decided to give or not. The fellowship offering was for joy in fellowship together – harmony. All of this was because the first offering was for their sin. Now, let's go back to Jesus where He tells us that His Father is looking for those who worship in the Spirit and in Truth. If we continue to live in sin and if we don't ask forgiveness for known sin in our lives, we can't worship the Lord in the right way. Sin blocks our relationship with our Father and Jesus knew this. This is why He allowed Himself to go to the cross. If we don't allow His Spirit to continually guard and protect our heart and minds, we are going to have a hard time worshipping God in the right way because we will not be in harmony with Him and the rest of the worshipers. His Spirit shines light on our sin and we must offer it to Jesus just like a sacrifice in the Old Testament so that we can worship God in Spirit and Truth. How can we worship in His Truth, if we have unconfessed sin in our lives? You can sing all different kinds of songs every Sunday and they'll mean nothing to the Lord. Remember, Paul tells us this in Romans 12: 1, "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. (NIV)" Sin affects worship. We can't ever forget this. Sin affected worship in the Old Testament and it still does in the New Testament times that we live in. God has shown us what He wants from us today in worship. So, why should we do this? Why is this so important? Why should this motivate us to true worship?

As Jesus makes His claim as the Son of God in John 5: 19 – 23, we read, ¹⁹ So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the

Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. ²¹ For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants. ²² In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge, ²³ so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him. (NLT – Biblegateway)

Jesus took the place of the goat, ox, and the ram for us. We should want to worship our Lord in the right way out of “honor” for Him. We don’t worship to please our selfish wants, but worship to give honor to our Lord who deserves all our honor and praise. We should “want” to make sure we are pure before Him as we worship. His Spirit can help us with that. You know, I like verse 24 of Leviticus where we read, “Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown. (NIV)” “All” the people were in “joy” and fell facedown. They knew their sins had been forgiven through those temporary methods. They were temporary because Jesus would replace those Old Testament methods. We should be more joyous and thankful than those in the Old Testament. If we’re not, maybe we don’t worship in Spirit and in truth because of sin. How do you worship? I leave you with this thought from a commentary: In order for us to truly worship God, we must have experienced the cleansing of our sin. As the sinful woman anointed the feet of Jesus out of her great love for him (Luke 7: 36 – 50), so our worship should be an expression of our love for Christ because we have experienced his great forgiveness. Our congregational worship times should be an expression of our ongoing individual relationship with him throughout the week (Wesley Commentary).

Wesley Bible Curriculum. Wesleyan Publishing House: Fishers, 2025