

SageTalk Episode 18: Worship: We Become Like What We Behold

- Paul Lawler: Greetings. This is Paul Lawler and I am with my cohost, Al Henson, and this is Sage Talk.
- Al Henson: It's great to be with you, Paul, and every brother, sister that's listening in, welcome, as we have a conversation. I like to think of this as that we're having a conversation, Paul, you and I, with Jesus with that brother and sister that has tuned in and so we thank you.
- Al Henson: We've been taking podcast after podcast and dealing with the general major subject of transformation, and some might ask why. Romans 8:29 says that God has purposed and determined even before the foundations of the earth that He wants us to be conformed to the image or made into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And so this is preeminent in our lives, Paul, of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Which we're talking in terms of words that people can get their hearts around and their minds around, and that is that literally we're walking down a grace highway. We're no longer under the law, Romans 6, but we're under grace and grace has made all that Jesus is, unmerited, but He's made all that Jesus is available to all that we need.
- Al Henson: And so if you need peace, there you have peace in Christ. If you need strength to overcome sin, you have the power of resurrection in Christ. If you need forgiveness, you have that in Christ. So grace is all that Jesus is made available to all that I need, as we journey down this grace highway toward transformation.
- Al Henson: We've been picking a subject or a practice that is important. Last podcast, we had confession. Today we're going to talk about worship. And it's such an important subject and important part of how we not only please God and honor God, but transformation taking place in worship.
- Paul Lawler: Absolutely. And Al, as we engage in this conversation, there's so many things that make worship when entered into in the right spirit, vibrant, alive, and life-giving. And so I'd like to begin our conversation in this way around this topic. We become like what we behold.
- Al Henson: Wow. You need to say that again, Paul.
- Paul Lawler: We become like what we behold.
- Al Henson: Give us something in the Bible, in the scriptures that really verifies that. We become...
- Paul Lawler: Like what we behold.
- Al Henson: Like what we behold.
- Paul Lawler: The scriptures say in Psalm 22:3, God inhabits the praises of Israel. He inhabits the praises of His people. And as God, as we praise Him, worship Him, magnify

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Him, the pattern or principle illustrated out of that passage is something supernatural is stirred, the revelation of God, the presence of God. And Al, I know many times this has been true in your life, mine, probably many of the lives of our listeners, but when I've been worshipping God privately or in a corporate setting, that the light of God, the revelation of God, maybe something from scripture will be magnified in my spirit, and I realize that as I'm worshipping God and magnifying God, that there's a communion taking place with the divine. And in that communion that there is revelation and light.

Paul Lawler: Now, I think one of the ways, and there are many ways to illustrate this, but one of the ways of illustrating this is when we get the opportunities of peering into Heaven and we see some opportunities in Isaiah 6, we see that in Ezekiel, we see that in Revelation 4. But let's lift out the Isaiah passage for just a moment.

Al Henson: Isaiah 6?

Paul Lawler: Isaiah 6, exactly. Where the cherub and seraphim are before the throne of God, and we're aware this is happening again when we see into Heaven in Revelation 4, but we see these angelic beings expressing holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. And, we see this is being repeated over and over and over again. Now on the surface, we can read something like this and peer into the heavenly realm and go, "Is that all that's happening around the throne of God? Is that redundant? Does that not get old?" But loved ones, we would submit to you to consider that our God is infinite and that our greatest satisfaction is found in Him.

Paul Lawler: And so as these angelic beings are praising God and expressing holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, what's happening is that they are experiencing an ever increasing and deepening revelation of God as God inhabits the praises that are being expressed around the throne.

Al Henson: It's interesting, Paul. There was just a first came to my heart in Psalm 16:11. David is coming to the end of his life and he's summing up some things, and in Psalm 16:11 he says, "In His presence," and that Psalm 22:3 that you said, it's praise. It's worship at the heart level that brings us into the presence of God. And David said, and he's coming to some conclusions, "In His presence I have found the fullness of joy."

Paul Lawler: And as you share that, I'll think about these angelic beings, that the more they worship and praise, the more this all creative God who is infinite fills their being with His presence and revelation in light. Only the more they praise, the more this infinite, all creative, all powerful, majestic God fills their being with revelation and light. It's perpetual.

Al Henson: We're talking about transformation, so actually they're getting into the presence of the transformer.

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- Paul Lawler: Right. Exactly.
- Al Henson: And He transforms them as they're in His presence.
- Paul Lawler: Yes. And so think about this, even as we worship with phrases like kingdom come, will of God be done on earth, which is another way of saying let what's up there come down here, that when we're engaged in worship, we're in synergy with what's happening in Heaven. And God, based upon this passage in the Psalms, is pouring out transformative power because it is Himself that's indwelling believers.
- Al Henson: I'm thinking of Paul and Philippians 3 that said he was religious and he was trying to move up in the church scene we might say, and then ultimately when he meets Christ on the Damascus road, he says, "I count all of that, all of my efforts, but done that I might know Him."
- Al Henson: And what you've just been sharing, it's actually in the presence of God that light comes and revelation comes and transforming comes and we really, really get to know Him there in His presence, to feel and experience His love. And Isaiah was doing that, and it's interesting that not only his confession then, Isaiah has a time of confession, but he also has this time of yieldedness and surrender and says he cries out to this Holy God, he hears the heart of God for Israel. And he says, "Here am I. Send me."
- Al Henson: So as we talk about worship today, I'm going to back us back up. I can tell you're excited about this one, Paul, and I'm glad. You should be, and you listening should be, because we know what it's like. The joy of being in the presence of God and living and walking in the presence of God. But let's back up a moment and try to help our listener along. Let's talk about... Let's define worship. I hope we've got you excited about wanting to know and to experience worship and to worship God. But let's talk about what it is and what it's not. Paul, start that conversation.
- Paul Lawler: That's a great question. You know, from a theological standpoint, it really is ascribing worth to the creator of the heavens and the earth. Every star, every galaxy, billions of stars, billions of galaxies, but also the one who has redeemed us through His gospel. But to ascribe Him worth not just out of head knowledge, not just out of awareness of who He is, but out of heart experience and love for who He is with awakened affection.
- Al Henson: Yeah. Sometimes the best way to understand something is to understand somewhat of what it's not, or what it's just not. When you talk about worship from the heart level, I think that a lot of people think worship is only when we sing. When we sing a song. I even hear people constantly saying, "Okay, we were just obeying God and now we're going to go in and sing. Now we're going to go worship God." Where actually worship is every moment of every day.

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Paul Lawler: Romans 12:1 and 2. Keep going.

Al Henson: Every attitude, every action either worships God or dishonors God. Worship is a matter of honoring and so worship is every moment of every day and it starts at the heart level. In America, and we've... Because I work among the nations a lot, we have piped this out of American. Wherever I go around the world, all I hear people thinking is, "Let's start singing so we can worship God." And I'm thinking, "No, we were just having a conversation about Jesus and I suspect that worshipped God also."

Al Henson: Or the way I eat my food and or not eat my food either worships God and honors God. So worship is coming from the heart and it's everything that we do. Let's settle there for a moment to try and define worship. Let's define worship at the heart level, Paul, just for a moment. Let's talk about that.

Paul Lawler: Yeah. I think that for the heart level of worship to be awakened, it must be rooted in devotion. And this is an awkward metaphor, but I know that love for my wife is awakened and deepened through acts of devotion and that is that when I'm kind, even when I don't feel like it, if I'm kind, if I'm sacrificial in the way that I love my wife, it awakens and stirs my affections for her.

Al Henson: This is what I hear you saying, Paul, is that as a baby is born and a child is born, as we begin to grow, we begin to establish inside of us at a deep level what's really valuable. And the [inaudible 00:11:30] of this world and all worldliness causes us to value money, to value properties, to value pleasure, to value titles, to value power and positions. And that's what we're trained to value.

Al Henson: And actually worship at the heart level comes when slowly those values, we to understand they're not of great value, and what actually is of value is it's not just that God is of value, but the ways of God and the things of God and the things that God has created, love and relationships, and the ability to love each other and care for one another and enjoy God and enjoy one another. These are the things that are really, really valuable.

Paul Lawler: That's said so well. And part of what fuels that, or what fuels that, is the revelation of God through scripture wed with the power of the Holy Spirit operating in the life of a believer. Because I need to get... If I'm going to get warmed in affection for Christ, I need to get near the flame.

Al Henson: So this goes back to this statement. We become what we behold.

Paul Lawler: Yes, yes.

Al Henson: And so most naturally in human beings, because we see only with our physical eyes, what we are beholding is what we're seeing day by day. Parents, you need to really listen to this. Then we would ask ourselves even as parents, how do we shepherd our children into the presence of God? Pastors listen, how do we

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shepherd our people through the word of God and through music and all? How do we shepherd? Our real goal is not to have beautiful sounding music. Our real goal is not to have this great orator standing to preach. All of those things, nothing wrong with any of that, but all of those are... The main purpose is to bring us in to the presence of God. Because in His presence then we find the fullness of joy, but in His presence we get to know Him. Values begin to change and our love and affections begin to change and this is what worship does and accomplishes.

Paul Lawler: So well said. Now I want to bring up something that I've observed both in my own experience and the experience of others related to worship, and I think it was so good for us to take some time to define what worship is, and that is there are times where as believers, and it's happened to me before as well, we can get in a, shall we say a bad mood or our circumstances or particularly challenging for a season, and in our own mind and heart some people would call it getting in a funk or a cloud, and then it affects our worship negatively, and I'm not merely referring to Sunday gatherings for worship. I mean our heart worship for God. And I've got a few things I want to say about that, but I want to ask you first.

Al Henson: I was thinking as you were talking about that, I'm going to go there with our listeners. I'm going to go there is that I just make a statement of observation, that much of what we call worship in our churches in America is only soulish. Now we're body, we're soul, and we are spirit. True worship has its foundation in the spirit, and in the spirit then that affects our emotions, which can affect our physical. So in our spirit when we value God as the way, how can we value Him for how much... But we have this awe of God, this value of God in our spirit, then that can affect our emotions. We can be weeping, we can be crying, we can be celebrating, we can...

Al Henson: But if we only see worship is soulish, then as you were saying, emotions can affect that. And I've actually seen skilled worship "leaders," I don't want to call them worship leaders, but leaders get a crowd into a soulish... what I would call a soulish frenzy. And they really think they have experienced God, but they have not. And again, I'm not saying that we don't worship God out of our soul, we worship God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our mind in the scriptures. But that originates in the spirit based upon truth and values and what you love and your affection in the spirit, then that pours out in the soul. And then yeah, it may affect you even physically. What you say, you're lifting your hands, you find David dancing in the streets.

Al Henson: And I'm not opposed to any of that. But if we think just because we get excited and start dancing, that's worship. It can be very soulish, it can be very natural, very even carnal. But true worship starts in the spirit.

Paul Lawler: Yeah, that's so well said. And related to that, I have found at times, and this probably goes back when I was in my 30s, and if I'm honest probably early 40s as well. I'm in my late 50s now. But I am mindful based on scripture, is God

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worthy of worship based upon my mood? He's worthy to be worshiped and adored because He is God, whether I feel it or I don't feel it. And what I've learned through the years is when I am in a place, what sometimes the mystics call the dark night of the soul. When I'm in that place to go ahead and worship God, choose to worship God because He's worthy to be praised and adored.

Paul Lawler: Now, I will also say that there have been many times, not every time, but many times when I have pressed into the worship and magnification of God when I am in a crisis or a circumstance that's very challenging that that has been a part of the catalyst for breakthrough of revelation or understanding or wisdom in terms of next rights steps as God would lead as I began to praise Him in my circumstance.

Paul Lawler: I think about David at Ziklag. David leads his army out, they come back, all the women and children have been taken. I don't remember if it was the Philistines or I can't remember which army that was right now, one of our listeners can let us... Send us an email and remind me. But you may remember that what David did in that moment was so counterintuitive. He goes off by himself and he worships. And as he communes with God, which is completely counterintuitive, his whole army hates him. All their wives and children have been lost, and here David is, who is their leader, their military strategist, and he's off in a corner worshipping for crying out loud.

Paul Lawler: And when he worships in this negative circumstance, God begins to speak to him because he gets in synergy with the heart of God, the heavenly realm, and as he does, God begins to speak to him and gives him wisdom and leading and light for next steps. And they end up, as you know the story, regaining their wives, their children, everything's restored to them plus.

Al Henson: Back to the Isaiah 6 passage, that was the same with Isaiah. I have many young people come to me and say, "I just wish I had some clarity on what God wants me to do." And I say to them, "Get in the presence of God," because in the presence of God, not only will transformation take place, but it's in there and it's just important to hear what I'm about to say, it's there that you'll hear the heart of God. The callings of God do not come out of the mind of God. They come out of the heart of God, because God is moved by love and love moves Him into wisdom. But God is love and He's moved by love, and so the callings of God upon my life to be a pastor was because He loved people and knew that they needed a shepherd and He saw sheep that were scattered. He saw so many false things that were being taught. People hurting and needing to be a shepherd and loved, and that came out of the heart of God.

Al Henson: And now I'm with Compassionate Hope and we're ministering in Southeast Asia to the least of these, rescuing the vulnerable ones, the trafficked ones, the OSEC children. And that calling did not come out just the mind of God, it came out of the heart of God as I was in the presence of God and I saw God weeping over these children and He had a way for them, the way of the Gospel, the way of

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love for them. And so you will find this true, young person. If you want guidance, get into the presence of God and there you'll find the heart of God and God will give you clarity and lead and guide your life there.

Paul Lawler: You know when you share that, Al, it illustrates worship builds faith as well. There's... When we worship, come into the presence of God, there's the will of God, the way of God, and the example you just shared, not only have thousands upon thousands of lives been touched through Compassionate Hope to the example you just gave, but out of the presence of God, the faith to move forward, to trust Him to move in these ways is well perpetuated.

Al Henson: So much to talk about. But sage points.

Paul Lawler: Well, we become like what we behold.

Al Henson: I think that's the number one thing we want you to pull out today is you become by what you behold. Secondly then, with the heart at the heart level, at the spirit level, when you worship, you get the opportunity to be in the presence of God and there you behold God. And that's where illumination comes and revelation comes by the spirit and the word of God, and you know more of God and of you and of life and all of those things.

Al Henson: So point one, we become what we behold. Secondly, get into the presence of God and there we behold Him, and if we behold Him, then we begin slowly to be transformed into His image.

Paul Lawler: I think another sage point too is the worship of God is not based upon our mood or our circumstances. And David illustrated that well when he was in the worst of circumstances and chose to worship God and magnify Him and God brought light and transformation in that circumstance.

Al Henson: I think the final sage point is that worship is either... Worship is every moment of every day and either we are worshiping God or we're not. And so the simplest act of washing someone's feet is a sweet act of worship to God. The giving of a gift is an act of worship. The singing of a song, the act of obedience. Even if we have sinned, which didn't worship God, and we repent and we confess our sin, that is an act of worship. Repentance is an act of worship to God. Paul, would you close us out in prayer?

Paul Lawler: It would be an honor. Let's pray together.

Paul Lawler: Father, we recognize there is nothing higher than you. If there were, you would have an idol, but there is nothing higher than you. And so God, we pray for every listener today. Lord, ignite fresh, life-giving understandings of worship, the transformation that comes as we magnify you, as you inhabit our praises. As we become like the one we behold, God, ignite worship in us that's rooted not in our moods and circumstances, but in a way that transcends all temporal

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earthly reality, whereby we do indeed join the heavenly realm in bringing to you eternal praise and glory. And we pray it in the strong and eternal name of Jesus. Amen.

Al Henson: Amen.