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≈ Praise and Worship

I glanced down at the bulletin that had been handed to me and was impressed with the cover which had a picture of Jesus holding a lamb in his arms with other sheep around his feet and the words, “I am the Good Shepherd” printed in artistic gold letters. The back reflected church information. Inside that folded page held the summation of Sunday services being conducted in Protestant churches in similar communities around the world. It bore similarity to the programs reproduced in the Armed Forces Hymnal--programs which gave direction and led congregations into worship. Printed in the back: an Order of Mass, an Order of Protestant Worship, The Divine Liturgy, The Rosary, Torah Service, Prayers--programs with a guaranteed outcome. They could be picked up and followed by anyone who desired to follow the plan. Someone in the gospel circuit mentioned that you couldn't put the Holy Ghost on a program, so they printed a line at the bottom of the page that the order of service was subject to change. And so it had.

Everyone stood as the worship and praise leader coached a chorus of praise encouraging the congregation to clap and sing along. If you didn't know the song, you would probably learn it before it was finished. Repetition caused you to anticipate the words. You hoped they would sing it one more time so you could sing along this time and get it right. Many churches invest in digital projectors which project the words across the walls of the church. Smaller groups are satisfied with overhead projectors and transparencies. Some still use hymnals. Others rely upon the praise team.

All the people were standing. Most were singing. The songs were familiar, soft, gentle proclamations of praise to God. The words were taken from Scriptures in the Bible. The music rose and fell like waves on the shore and then sometimes it was like water in a rippling brook. Some had their eyes closed and raised their hands or bowed their heads. Some were so involved they sang as if they wanted to be the song leader. Others just rocked from side to side in time with the music. Song after song the song leader encouraged the members to worship, sharing precious witness of how he made it through trials in his life.

“If it had not been for the Lord on my side.”

“Yes, Lord.” Several agreed and waved their hands in appreciation.

Then suddenly the song changed. The drummer found a rhythm that emulated a quick gallop, with the organist accompanying with a bass walk in the background. The simplicity of the beat was one which I had become so familiar with, I glanced around to see who would respond. The beat was an invitation for congregational participation as worshippers expressed their praise in dancing, moving, weeping, bowing down, jumping or running. There is a special combination of steps, stomps, jumps, and expertly coordinated moves which we call shouting. People have customized and perfected their shout, practicing at times when no one is watching. Others just let go uncontrollably in an outburst of praise, and we say that God had His way with them.

Scripturally, praise is desired and accepted by God. King David is recorded in the book of the Kings of Israel to have

rejoiced and danced on the occasion that the ark of the covenant was being returned. King David danced out of his kingly robes and was ridiculed by Michal, his wife. Her disdain resulted in her being cursed with childlessness (2 Samuel 6:13-23). David was known for his many psalms of praise and adoration. He was responsible for the tabernacle of David where praise was offered continually day and night. It was a shadow of the church in which we show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness and into His marvellous light.

The drummer was the key player in this powerful leading moment. The beat had no scheme, it was wild and free. You were not limited by being in time with the beat. However you moved would still be in rhythm. A lady wearing a black and white polka dot dress with buttons down the back a couple of pews in front of me threw up her hands, threw back her head and collapsed with seemingly epileptic convulsions. The experience startled some of the children, but nothing stopped. The worship continued. The singing continued. The children who had not given in to sleep during the quiet song were imitating the adults waving their hands, moving their feet, swaying from side to side. The musicians repeated the galloping beat, causing the shouting to intensify. The organ roared. Ushers gathered to cover the collapsed lady with a sheet. There were others displaying some type of physical expression of worship, praise, or some degree of breakthrough. The music stopped, and shouts of praise rose in acappella magnificence.

I used to feel involved during these praise and worship services. There was a moment of exhortation where I spoke words of praise

and adoration to the Lord which lifted me up and led me to a spirit of confession and repentance. Becoming lost in the sense of God's presence, I felt that my praise was accepted. I appreciated that I was free to lift my hands and worship uninhibited by programs and regulations.

Some church experiences are conducted under the direction of set protocol. Congregational singing is directed and preselected, but utterances of personal gratitude are seen as unwelcome outbursts. I suppose you can refrain from vocalizing your enthusiasm about God until you are alone in the confines of your quiet place, but why waste the opportunity to join in with people of like passions and open your mouth to say, "Hallelujah!"

We used to say that churches without music and dance and active participation from the congregation were dead, but I am so tired today, I would welcome a quiet service, "...turn to Hymn number 451... O Zion Hope...the Scripture will be coming from Psalm 23"...little grey-haired saint on the organ...assistant pastor leading the choir.

Some may question what makes people act like this? I have seen children imitating adults or "playing church." Sometimes people move their bodies to mimic uncontrolled shaking and thrashing because they have seen others act that way and feel that is what they are supposed to do, so they pretend lest they be accused of not letting God have His way. And it is also true that people tend to lose physical capacity during spiritual encounters. Scripture records an account of a child who was possessed of a devil which made him behave as a lunatic who tried to inflict harm

on himself by falling into fire or water (Matthew 17:15-18). The unusual behavior of the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost included their ability to speak languages they had not learned as well as their loss of some physical coordination which made them appear to be drunk (Acts 2:8-15). When Stephen was arrested, it is written of him that he was full of faith and power and did great wonders and miracles among the people (Acts 6:8). When he was arrested and began to speak with divine wisdom, his face appeared as the face of an angel. After Phillip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, the Spirit of the Lord caught Phillip away and transported him to another geographic location (Acts 8:39). Saul was blinded for three days when he saw the bright light of his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:23).

Some experts on human behavior will say that the demonstrations of joy and excitement that are displayed in Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Holiness movements are all self-induced, a by product of mob mentality, the same stimulus and response that comes from being at your favorite sporting event or interacting at a social gathering. That may be true, but one thing about personal experiences is that no one can change them. When you experience supernatural happenings yourself, no one can tell you that they didn't occur. What others perceive from their vantage point does not explain the depth of that experience from what you know has happened to you.