



Worship and Theophostic Ministry

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I (Karl) wanted to share a few quick thoughts regarding worship, and especially about my own experience with how memory-associated lies have hindered my ability to worship, and how resolving these lies has blessed my worship experience.

One problem I often have in worship is being distracted by the many immediate concerns in my life. To be able to worship, I often need to choose to take my focus off these distractions and choose to focus on the Lord.

However, in my experience a much bigger hindrance to worship is that I don't have internal unity regarding the truth about who the Lord is. I know, cognitively, that the Lord is faithful, loving, powerful, always with me, truthful, just, etc. – *deserving of worship and praise*. But experientially there are/were parts of my mind where these things don't/didn't *feel* true.¹ What *felt/feels* true comes from many childhood memories, where the thoughts and emotions from negative experiences with authority figures got stuck to the Lord. What *felt* true is that God doesn't protect His children (like the teachers that were in the lounge drinking coffee instead of on the play ground). What *felt* true is that God doesn't know and see everything (like my father when he accidentally closed the car trunk on my head).² What *felt* true is that God will criticize and blame me for being stuck, but not give me the help that I need to solve the problem (like my first grade teacher when I couldn't read).³ What *felt* true is that God won't come when I need him (like my parents when I had to stay with friends at two years old).⁴ What still *feels* true is that God ignores injustice (like my grade-school gym teacher who seemed blind to cheating, and made little effort to prevent it). What still *feels* true is that God can't *really* be trusted to keep His promises (like the politicians of my childhood). To be painfully honest, the words of many worship songs felt like flattery and propaganda, and I felt like a hypocrite when I sang them because they didn't *feel* true.

A strange part of this experience is that I initially had no insight regarding the true roots of my

¹ Note that this is written with a mixture of past tense and present tense. As of November 22, 2002, some of these lies about the Lord have been resolved and others have been identified but not yet resolved. I can feel that each lie I resolve makes it easier for me to worship. Before starting this healing process, I couldn't figure out why anybody would *want* to worship, and I thought that the people who worshiped enthusiastically must be faking it. Now I actually enjoy worship, and am even one of the worship leaders at our church.

² See “Dad/God isn't all knowing or all powerful: a case study and discussion” on the Case Studies page of our web site (www.kclehman.com) for additional description of this example.

³ See “Dissociation, Repression, Denial, and Avoidance: ‘Where did kindergarten and first grade go?’” on the case study page of our web site for additional description of this example.

⁴ See “‘He Won't Come/He Doesn't Want to Come,’ A Case Study and Discussion” (forthcoming) on the case studies page of our web site for additional description of this example.

negative thoughts/perceptions towards the Lord. It seemed like there were understandable reasons in my current adult life for my negative thoughts regarding the Lord's character. For example, I truly believed that my perception that the Lord couldn't be trusted to take care of His children was primarily an adult, cognitive struggle. "But He *doesn't* take care of His children – look at all of the Christians that have been murdered in Turkey and that are starving to death in Angola!" Before using Theophostic ministry, I had no awareness of the true roots of the problem, and I spent *thousands* of hours trying to resolve the problem in my adult cognitive mind. I have 16 books on this subject, and have spent hundreds of hours going through the 3064 pages contained in these volumes. I received wise pastoral counsel, and discussed and thought and prayed about this question endlessly. But it never seemed adequate. No matter what I did, it still *felt* like the Lord couldn't be trusted to take care of His children. No amount of teaching, reading, thinking, discussion, or praying was able to resolve my negative perceptions of the Lord because they were still anchored in underlying childhood memories. However, when I went to the underlying childhood memories and resolved the memory-anchored lies about the Lord, all of a sudden the cognitive answers I already had were adequate. I didn't discover any new insights with my cognitive mind, but it no longer felt true that the Lord couldn't be trusted to take care of His children.

Another example is that for most of my life it has *felt* true that God is scary, unpredictable, and unsafe. I realize that there are good and true ways in which God is scary, unpredictable, and not safe – like Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia.⁵ However, what *felt* true to me was that God is scary, unpredictable, and unsafe in a bad way – like a person who gets triggered, and then acts unpredictably and frighteningly out of his or her triggered angry emotions. "But this is a reasonable perception!" some part of my mind would argue. "Look at all the stuff in the Old Testament – where the Lord orders the Israelites to commit genocide,⁶ and strikes a man dead for trying to be helpful⁷." I worked for decades trying to resolve this feeling that God was bad-scary, receiving counsel from wise pastors, reading thousands of pages on the subject, thinking, discussing, journaling, and praying. But the results were very mediocre. I could sort-of combat my negative thoughts and feelings with all the cognitive material, but the negative thoughts and emotions would come rushing back every time something triggered the underlying memories and lies. Then, when I finally found and resolved the memories that exactly matched my thoughts and feelings towards the Lord, the issue resolved. I didn't have any new cognitive insights, but suddenly all of the material I already knew *felt* adequate, whereas before it hadn't. All of a sudden I was able to just let it go. I still have questions about the same passages in the Old Testament, but now it feels like the evidence for the Lord's goodness is adequate to balance my questions. Before, what *felt* true was "I can't figure it all out, and the summary of all the evidence seems to indicate that the Lord is bad (scary, unpredictable, and unsafe)." Now, what *feels* true is

⁵ As Mr. and Mrs. Beaver tell the children: "...if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly....'Course he isn't safe. But he's good." Lewis, CS. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, (Harper Collins: New York, NY.) 1950, p.80.

⁶ Deut 20:16-17 "However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you."

⁷ 2 Sam 6:6-7 "When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God."

“I still can’t figure it all out, I still don’t have all the answers, but now I can trust all the evidence indicating that the Lord is good. It *feels* true that the Lord is good.”

Since I have been using Theophostic ministry, *every* time I identify and focus on a negative thought/perception regarding the Lord, it eventually goes back to some childhood memory where a negative experience with an authority figure exactly matches the negative thought/perception I have towards the Lord.

I think that one of the most important things I can do for my ability to worship in spirit and in truth is to address these memory-associated lies about the character of the Lord. When I know the truth about God *experientially*, when the truth about God *feels* true, it will be difficult to do anything else other than worship. I think I will have to discipline myself to stop worshipping in order to get anything else done, in order to sleep at night.

A good analogy is driving through the Grand Teton mountains. When I drive through the Tetons, I *experience* their grandeur. I see and experience that they are awesome, IMMENSE, spectacular, and beautiful. This is not just cognitive thoughts about them, but rather experiential reality. And I experience internal unity. There are not parts of my mind where it *feels* true that the Tetons are really small, ugly, and dirty, disagreeing with my adult, cognitive mind where I am listing the attributes – “the Tetons are huge, pristine, and beautiful”. When I drive through the Tetons I don’t need to focus my thoughts on the attributes of the Tetons in order to praise them, but rather experience spontaneous praise. Appreciation and praise flows forth involuntarily – “Wow!” “Incredible!” “Look! Look at THAT!” “Spectacular!” “Isn’t that beautiful?!” I would have to concentrate and discipline myself to *not* praise them.

As a worship leader there have been times when I challenged the congregation regarding their lack of enthusiasm, as if the problem was that they were just lazy, or choosing to withhold enthusiastic worship for some strange reason. I think it is important to recognize that it is not helpful to scold ourselves into trying to manufacture feelings for the Lord that are inconsistent with what we actually believe, or to try to stir up more vigorous outward expressions that don’t flow from our true hearts. I think that if we practice the discipline of turning our focus away from our distractions and towards the Lord, and if we address the lies that undermine our perception of the truth about who the Lord is, we will experience worship that is wonderfully enthusiastic, but free of the bad feeling that comes with forced or embellished emotion and expression.

Prayer: I am currently experimenting with the following prayer regarding the lies that hinder my worship: “Lord, I confess that I still carry many lies about who You are, about Your character. I ask your forgiveness for believing these lies about who You are. I ask that You would bring these lies into the light. Lead me to the memories where they are anchored and replace them with Your truth, so that I may know, experientially, the truth about who You are – so that appropriate praise will flow spontaneously from my heart and mind – so that I will be more able to worship You in spirit and in truth. Thank you, Lord, that You are worthy of praise.”