

Raising our hearts, minds and voices

by Bill Richart

After a recent night of healing praise, a woman came up to me with tears streaming down her face and told me that the Lord had touched her deeply during the worship. After we thanked him together, she told me that she was going to go home to change a few things, because “I just can’t stay the way I am anymore.” In the Lord’s incredible Presence she could not remain the same.

The Lord is calling us into *much* deeper holiness.

One of the ways that the Lord has given us to grow in holiness is through praise and worship. My “mission statement” or philosophy of ministry is this: “My greatest joy is bringing the people of God, through worship, to that place of Presence where the Lord moves in power.” When the Spirit is moving in power, lives are changed, tears flow and healing takes place.

It is no mistake that Billy Graham invites crowds to accept Christ as their Lord and savior while the choir sings “Just As I Am.” Music

has the ability to cut through the noise in our minds and speak straight to the heart—because God made it that way. As St. Augustine said, “He who sings, prays twice.” Prayer brings us into the Presence of the living God and singing our prayer brings us into a special Presence, a special grace.

Pope John Paul II stated in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, “Training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer. . . . Prayer can progress, as a genuine dialogue of love, to the point of rendering the person wholly possessed by the divine Beloved, vibrating at the Spirit’s touch. . . . Our Christian communities must become genuine ‘schools’ of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help, but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion until the heart truly ‘falls in love’” (n. 32, 33). As people involved in the Charismatic Re-

newal, we have a special gift of prayer which pours from us and through us as we pray in the Spirit (cf. Rm. 8:26).

So, how do we get into—and stay in—that place of Presence? A few suggestions:

- ❖ First, recognize that the Lord moves powerfully in praise and make it a priority in our private prayer time, our prayer meetings and our conferences. Too often it is the first thing cut if we are running late or have a teaching to give. Not giving God the time he deserves is a quick way to stifle the transforming move of the Spirit.

- ❖ Set a *minimum* time of praise. Too often praise leaders are given a maximum time and are unable to respond when the Spirit moves in an unexpected way. Why put the Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity, the fire of God—in a box? I have no doubt that what-



ever wonderful things the Spirit has planned will be infinitely better than what I have planned.

❖ Let the anointing build through the worship session; don't cut off the praise. Once the Spirit is interrupted, it's almost necessary to start over. I keep the music going between songs—this encourages singing in tongues and often will release this gift in those who have not received it.

❖ Speak the truth in love. I know someone who genuinely believes that, when she interrupts the "flow" to read a whole chapter of Ephesians, she is being obedient to the Spirit. I believe that charismatic leadership is not about "leading" but rather discerning what the Spirit is doing, and *getting out of the way*—and not letting anything or anyone else get in the way. If someone is out of order, speak the truth in love and clear the way for the Lord!

❖ Do not be afraid of silence. Sometimes the Lord will move us into a time of sustained worship in tongues, followed by an intense period of quiet. Good worship tends to lead into silence, the type of silence that is presence, where the Lord is speaking beyond words. Stay there; don't go to the next thing. If he is speaking beyond words, a return to words (another song, a Scripture, even a prophetic word) is actually a step away from the intimacy of gazing upon his face. Stand in the glory!

❖ Make provisions for praise. If your worship leader needs to improve (and we all do), pray for him/her, then send him/her to a workshop and cover the expense. If you don't have a live musician, try tapes. We recorded a live praise tape in Detroit which is used by prayer groups all over the country. One live session with praise, worship, glory, singing in tongues, silence, etc. (rather than a compilation of songs) most truly reflects what we (and

the Lord) do during a praise set. However you do it, plan on praising!

❖ Be sure that your praise leader is part of the leadership of the prayer group. One song "out of order" can totally change the direction of a prayer group. Leaders must share the same vision for the meeting!

Yes, entering into the Lord's Presence through deep praise and worship causes us to love him more, to want him more, and to grow in holiness, the very reflection of the face of God. Let Jesus Christ be Lord and praise him with all you've got! ♦



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