



A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: DECEMBER 2022

by Lee Shipp

JUST ONE LOOK CHANGED EVERYTHING

Many years ago, a minister was intent on worshipping God with his whole life. He suffered greatly from his failure and the constant distractions that he battled as he pursued God in worship. Hearing of an aged minister who enjoyed joyful intimacy with God, he sought the man out for assistance. He contacted the aged and respected minister whose life exemplified worship, inquiring about a particular time of instruction.

He asked the aged man, "What is it like to be with God; to worship God?" The old man responded, "While you are with me, we will spend our time together. I will teach you all that is possible, everything I know. However, I cannot teach you experience. There will come the point when you hear a call from deep within; it is imperative that you give complete diligence to that call. If you do, you will experience the worship of God!"

The aged worshipper of God told the young man, "You will meet with me at all my appointed times of prayer."

Several times during the day, the two men would go off to pray and shut themselves in with God. Indeed, the young man was stirred by the intimacy the aged worshipper had with God and sought with great effort to have the same. However, the harder he tried, the more complex the most common spiritual exercises became.

Unable to sleep, the young man was fumbling around the house in the early morning hours. He noticed a light on in the study. Gazing through the opening in the door he saw the aged worshipper holding the globe in his arms, as though he were hugging it. The old man's tears were flowing, hitting the globe, and running all over the world. The young man said that he learned more about worship at that moment than he had in all the days of his life.

He realized that worship has nothing to do with the energy of the flesh and trying harder. It is not the routine of religious exercises but the surrender of a heart to the fire of God! It is something that happens to you because you walk with Jesus. However, the young man was discouraged because he feared his heart would never be as receptive as the old man's.

The next day the weather turned bad. It was rainy as the storms rolled through. After attending to a few duties in town the young man returned to the aged worshipper, but he was not home. He discovered that the man was down in his office. So off he went to seek out the old man. By the time he got to the man's office in the center of town, he could hear the aged minister. He could hear him singing. He sang the lines from that great hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." The young man stood alone in the darkness and the rain, listening ... pondering the truth he had heard.

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, o, take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.*

As he stood outside, seeing the flicker of the candle in his room, he felt he was standing on sacred soil. The old man's private worship was obvious. He walked away having learned that worship was not an event, it was not an exercise, nor was it a discipline. Worship was intimacy with a real and living God. Worship is not what you do, it is what you are. People worship publicly because they worship privately. The young man listened as the aged worshipper gave his heart to God all over again, as though it were the first time he had ever met Jesus. The young man could sense the urgency of the old man's cry, that the thing the old man feared more than anything was a cold heart! The young man pondered that this aged worshipper of God was not worshipping God because he was a great worshipper but because God is a great God. The old man feared his heart and did the only thing with it he knew to do; he gave his heart to God – every day!

The young man spoke with his mentor and confessed that he overheard him praying in the early morning and now at the office. He then said to the old man, "However, you told me all the times you prayed, but you didn't tell me about these other times. The aged worshipper said, "One thing you've got to learn about God if you want to have a fiery baptism of His Spirit, you make appointments with God, and you always keep them." The old man continued, "Son, every time you and I prayed together, that was my appointment with the Father, but those other times of prayer were the Father's appointment with me! When He called me in that morning hour, my heart said, "Your face, oh God will I seek."

How is your heart? Can you hear God calling for you? Do you answer? Is the deep in you crying back to God? Do you lie awake on your bed at night longing for Him? Have you heard Him longing for you? Do you respond? Have you discovered that everything you are looking for in life, everything you want for happiness is in the Lord?

A.W. Tozer commented in his book, *The Pursuit Of God*, "Let the average man be put to the proof on the question of who is above, and his true position will be exposed. Let

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him be forced into making a choice between God and money, between God and men, between God and personal ambition, God and self, God and human love, and God will take second place every time. Those other things will be exalted above. However the man may protest, the proof is in the choices he makes day after day throughout his life."

JESUS IS TRANSCENDENT

Jesus is supernaturally unmatched, unequalled, and unrivalled. He is supremely above all other things. He is beyond compare. Nothing can be brought up or presented that can even pose a worthy distraction. Jesus is astounding. He gripped the hearts of people from all walks of life.

Since the time of His arrival on earth, multitudes have flocked to Him. From every race, people, tribe, and tongue, they have surrendered their hearts to Him. He is not a passing fade. He is not a fairy tale. He is the center of all history. He is the image of the invisible God. To be stunned by Jesus is to be stunned by God.

Do not be fooled by the professors. Multitudes believe in Him but have never been arrested by His worth. They have no capacity to perceive the excellencies of the Lord. God's love surpasses all human emotion and intellect. Seeing and grasping the unfathomable God demands a spiritual hunger and capacity that only the Spirit of the Lord can provide.

Bland people who gather to listen to the Bible being preached, who sit in pews without emotion, who sing songs to a God their hearts have never met are not to be confused with those worshippers who have stolen away from the allurements of disciplines and formalities, have pressed their way into the Divine presence and passionately cry to Him, "I heard you! My heart heard you. You said to seek your

face. Here I am Lord. My heart wants to seek your face.”

Multitudes through the years have given Him their lives, hearts, and worship. They forsook fortunes and fame to know Him. Great men followed Jesus. Men who changed history and sired nations followed Jesus. They were eyewitnesses of His majesty. Worship God ... and enjoy Him – this is the sole duty of man.

The heart is the primary issue: all God has wanted and sought in man was a burning heart of love. Jesus said the most significant thing a man can do is to love the Lord with all his heart, strength, and mind. If a man does not worship God, he is broken; his world is broken!

CAN YOU WORSHIP JESUS?

Jesus is the hero of heaven, the hero of the ages, the hero of the Church, but is He yours? The proof is in the pudding. Watch the number of depressed people who go to church. They do not worship God. They sing. They have respect, but they refuse to give Him their worship publicly. They choose depression over praise.

God does not have many friends and lovers. Jesus questioned Peter if he loved Him more than “these things.” These things refer to religion. Do you love Jesus or His miracles? Do you love Jesus or how He feeds the poor? Do you love Jesus or His teachings on love? Jesus asks you today, “Do you love Me more than the hymns, the church, the ministry?”

Many want Jesus in their homes and like having Him near, but they do not lie awake on their beds and think about Him through the night. Many like to go to the house of God and have Jesus as the guest of honor. Like all the men at Simon the leper’s house, they love to sit around and have Jesus entertain them, but how few are the Marys who break their alabaster boxes and pour upon Him their unashamed love?

God is the great lover. We think we are the ones pursuing God, but the truth is that He is the One pursuing us. There is a love that is better than life! Think of it! God delighting in you ... LOVING YOU. For this love, men and women of all ages have stolen away from the world’s allurements to saturate themselves in absolute delight. They were the happiest people on the planet! People like Paul considered the value of all the world’s goods and attainments as dung compared to the beauty of Jesus Christ! What did they know? They knew Him. They were eyewitnesses of His majesty. They saw Him. They beheld His glory. They did not follow cunning fables; they gave their lives for someone!

Come on now! Do you want to be great? I hear it all the time, “I want to do something great. I want my life to count.” Well, here is the greatest thing you can do ... the greatest! Love the Lord your God with all your heart! That is right, the greatest thing is not how much money you give, not how many mission trips you take, not how often you fast, not how popular you are at preaching. All too often, these things become the things we love, and God is lost to our godly endeavors. Why is this so hard to understand?

I was the guest speaker at a Pastor’s Conference in Warsaw, Poland. I spoke on this subject of worship, of having our passions set on fire for God with all our affections erupting within us for Him. One morning an aged pastor approached me. He was sarcastic, full of religion and dryness, saying, “You know this is not true; it is impossible – such affections with God, such emotions.”

I asked him, “Have you ever kissed God? Have you ever heard Him sing over you? Have you ever touched Him? Has He ever kissed you?” He said, “I do not understand.” I held his hand, said, “You poor, poor preacher!” and walked away. The next day he sought me out weeping and asked, “Is it possible?” I said, “What kind of God would offer His Son as a sacrifice for my life and would not want to be intimate with me?” He said, “I am different. I believe. I shall love Him with my heart and soul!”

A few days later his eyes were different, his worship was different. I approached him. He said, “I have something to tell you.” I replied, “You already did.” He said, “But we have not spoken for a few days.” To which I agreed, but I was able to tell him that I have seen that you see. Your worship is different; your eyes are different

– you look like a man who has been in the secret place. Elated, he responded with tears and smiles. His weeping prevented him from speaking clearly, but he did manage to say that it is true, God is to be loved and our hearts are to be fire.

THE FIGHT OF FAITH

If you want an enduring ministry, never lose the sense of wonder and glory in the cross and blood of Jesus – consider it the most spectacular display of love and beauty that cannot be improved.

The fight of faith and the battle to behold the glory of the Lord is a day-to-day fight. Sometimes this must be a violent act of faith. I mean violent in the sense of pursuit. The fight of faith is not allowing our sight or feelings to distract us from what is real. By faith, we overcome the demands of lesser things for the reward of the irreplaceable One. You must, by faith, believe and act upon the promise that He is a Rewarder!

A.W. Tozer explained it like this, “I would rather die, I would rather walk out here on the sidewalk and drop over and be gathered up by the authorities and carried away than to lose my receptivity and lose my hunger and lose my DISCONTENT WITH MY PRESENT STATE. No longing after God, no deep yearning for holiness, no inner hunger to be like Jesus!”

Please don’t let dry men full of devotion, RUINED BY SEMINARIES, explain to you passionate affection for God! These drab people, destitute of the Holy Ghost and fire, DRAB MINISTERS who have institutionalized the church and know nothing of worship may give me a lesson in Hebrew, but they know nothing about the secret place. The tragedy of the ages: The God of love, who sacrificially pursues man with perfect love, is scorned by the man. The tragedy in the church: Dry men, who lack intimacy and the capacity to love want to teach us how to worship. They take the fire of passion out of it. But God said I want to love you as I do My Son! You will never convince me that God’s love for His Son Jesus was cold and heartless. Dead loveless preachers are killing the spirit of worship.

Why did God write the Song of Solomon? So dead religious men could not define love with God. In this book of love, God could demonstrate His great passion and desires for us.

Go ahead, love God. Give Him all your love. Hold nothing back. Let the whole world see. Loving God is not about the world’s acceptance; it is not about the world thinking we are okay; it is about God being my hero and my lover in a world that hated Him. You want men to accept you, and they hated Jesus? You want to be seen as civil and normal, and they called Jesus a devil? You cannot love the Father and have the love of the world at the same time. So, you choose: Do you want the world to think you are a fool or God?

Beloved, if you read anything, then carefully read this: the greatest persecution you will ever face when it comes to loving God will be from those within your church, your family, and your friends. They will resent your ability to see, feel, and know God. You will embarrass them. They will call you mad and unbalanced. They will intimidate you and tell you that you are just trying to be seen. Yep! I sure am, just like a bride who fills up a church with all her family and friends to watch her express and confess her love for her soon-to-be husband. Yep, I want you to see how much I love Him.

I long for the fellowship of the unashamed! I long for the day when the lost are compelled into the Church again, because of the fame of Jesus and not because of our music or showmanship preachers. That even now, the lost would come to see the glory of a people being loved by the Almighty Lover.

Do you still question all this love stuff, all this emotion, all this talk about affection? Well then, why does God have a bride? Why does God reveal Himself as a Father? Why does God want to be the “LOVER” of my soul? Why do we sing, “Jesus, lover of my soul ...?” Why does God keep all my tears in His bottle? Why has God inscribed me on the palms of His hands? Why does God number my hair? Why did God send His Son? Because He is looking for a heart that will reciprocate His love and share in His kingdom.