

## Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

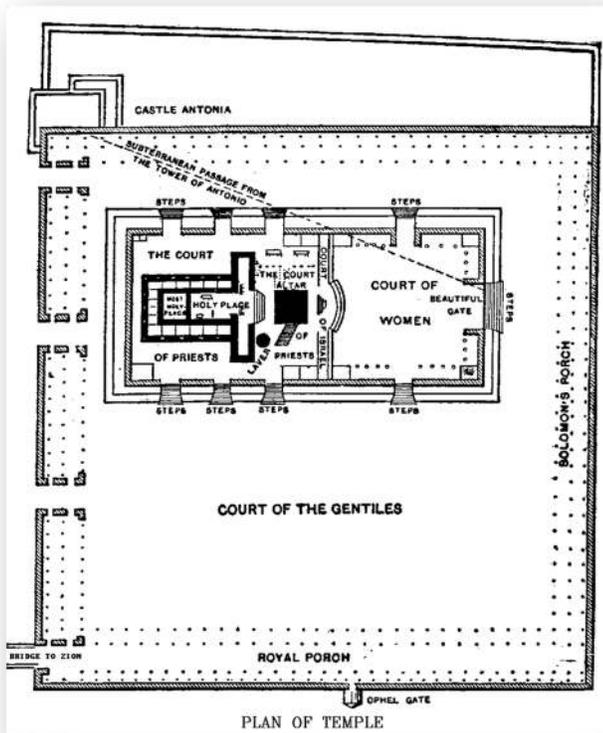
January 9, 2018

On Sunday we considered the idea that worship is the means by which we “reset” our lives, re-calibrating our lives through personal relationship with the One who is truly Real, and we used John’s vision of heaven’s throne room in Revelation 4-5 as background to that consideration.<sup>1</sup>

There’s another metaphor I’d like to suggest that may prove helpful, both for corporate and private experiences of worship. I very much doubt that this idea is original with me, but I do not remember where I learned of it.

We saw that John’s vision “moved toward the center” as he first became aware of the twenty-four elders around the Throne of God. After this, he became aware of the four “living beings” around the Throne, and then he became aware of the Lamb of God standing next to the Throne.

I’d like to suggest an approach to worship that is a little bit like this “moving toward the center” experience John had in this vision. This is a six-step means of approaching God’s Presence, sequenced as such approach worked the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> We obviously can’t make these physical movements, but we can move through these stages in our spirits as we approach our Lord in worship. This is not THE Way to worship. It is just one idea that may or may not work for you.



I doubt that any of us would pay a visit to our Governor, to a Member of Congress, or to the White House without making preparation for that visit. Similarly, we are wise to give thought to how we approach the Throne of God. This is, after all, the Creator of every universe there may be—the Lord of All.

At the same time, it also helps me to know that we are invited, wanted, and welcome to come into God’s Presence. I often remember visiting my Dad when he was the Director of the Cotton Cladding Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. There were several layers of administrative people who had to be navigated before finally reaching Dad’s office; but I never had any difficulty getting through that maze, because *I was*

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.sugarsync.com/pf/D395962\\_08797820\\_6885655](https://www.sugarsync.com/pf/D395962_08797820_6885655)

<sup>2</sup> This is the Second Temple, Herod’s Temple. Solomon’s Temple was similar, but not just like this.

his son. So it is with the heavenly courts: we are children of the King! God's invitation to us is always to *come in farther; to come up higher; to come nearer!*

Beginning outside the Temple, there were six stages of approach to God. The **first stage** was to enter the gates of the Temple, an initial separation from the world and its distractions. To experience the first stage in our personal practice requires some sort of intentional separation from the world. For some, this would mean a "prayer chair" or a "prayer closet." For all of us, this would likely mean turning off the phone.



The **second stage** was to pass through the three courts: the Court of the Gentiles; the Court of the Women; and the Court of Israel. The one hundredth psalm tells us how to do this. We enter the gates "with thanksgiving," and we enter the courts "with praise" (v. 4). One way to experience this stage would be to begin your quiet time with the reading (perhaps aloud) of one of your favorite psalms of praise.



The **third stage** of worship brings us to the basins of cleansing, where the sacrifices were prepared. After thanksgiving and praise, worship brings us to an attitude of repentance and to the cleansing of forgiveness. In this part of worship, our challenge is to be still before the Lord and to confess any sin of which we're aware, whether sin of behavior, attitude, omission, or thought. And in this part of our worship, we also ask God to reveal to us areas of sin of which we are not fully aware. The joyful part of stage three is that we have God's promise that "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9).

Past the basins of repentance and forgiveness, **stage four** brings us to the Altar of Sacrifice. It was here that the sacrificial animals were killed and burned on the altar, and this is probably the hardest part of this sequence. Paul tells us to "*put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry*" (Colossians 3:5).

Notice that this sacrifice requires active participation on our part. We turn from, indeed, we *put to death* (metaphorically!) anything that contends for God's place in our hearts. It is here that we offer to God anything and everything, so that we can say with Paul, "*I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Galatians 2:19-20). As we leave stage four, with empty hands and open hearts, our hearts and minds have been lightened such that we can rejoice in stage five.

The **fifth stage** of worship brings us to the Holy Place. It was here that the Bread of the Presence was kept, symbolizing God's nourishment of His people. Here the golden lampstands symbolized God's Light in our Darkness; here the altar of incense symbolized the prayers of God's people. In the Holy Place, we worship God with prayer and praise and singing. Whether you can actually "carry a tune" or not, the Holy Place can be a place of singing—out loud!

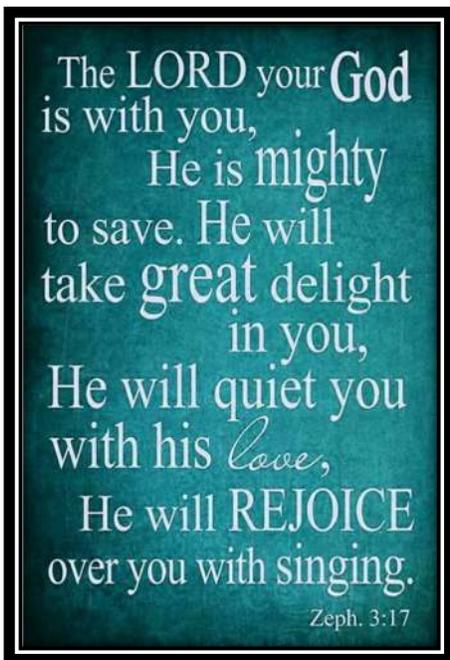
As our hearts become more and more tuned to eternity, we begin to sense the realities described in Robert Lowry's classic hymn:

I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin;  
I see the blue above it;  
And day by day this pathway smooths,  
Since first I learned to love it.

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,  
A fountain ever springing;  
All things are mine since I am His—  
**How can I keep from singing?**

Finally, because of and through the Blood of Jesus, the **sixth stage** brings us into the Most Holy Place, the very Presence of God. The Most Holy Place is a place of quietness. Here we listen for God's Voice and experience God's Presence.

Prayer is simply conversation, when one of the participants is God. Up to this point, we've been doing most of the talking and singing. Now we fall expectantly silent and wait for God's "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12). Now, perhaps, we experience the reality of my very favorite verse in the Bible:



*The LORD your God is with you.  
He is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you.  
He will quiet you with his love.  
He will rejoice over you with singing!  
(Zephaniah 3:17).*

