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Foreword

Several years ago, the choir in my church undertook a four-week study to identify some significant scripture passages that would serve as a biblical foundation for our ministry. From those, we selected four to serve as the main “pillars” that would guide us and give us focus. It was incredibly insightful and wonderfully rewarding to dig into the Word and discover for ourselves what God had to say about worship and about those who lead it. We ended up with a fresh sense of our calling and a renewed passion to fulfill it.

And that’s what led to this volume you’re looking at right now! Here are sixty devotional thoughts, based on sixty significant scripture passages, that are designed to encourage you and prompt you, whether you’re a worship leader, a worship ministry participant, or anyone “following hard after God.” For all of us, worship itself is a response—a response to God for all He is and for all He’s done. You’ll read a lot about that concept in these pages.

You might choose this book as a companion to your own personal devotional times. Each entry includes a pertinent scripture passage along with a key verse. A few minutes each day to quietly let God’s Word wash over you may be just what you need.

Or it could be that a group study is more in line for you right now. Walking through these thoughts alongside those with whom you serve could be a rich and unifying experience, allowing everyone to be, literally, “on the same page.” The questions at the end of each entry were designed for that very thing. I hope they prompt some thoughtful discussion.

God has said that His Word would not return to Him void. My prayer for you is that as you allow His Word to dwell in you richly, you’ll see again—or maybe for the very first time—that the worship of God is the highest calling of the believer.

Marty Parks

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God-Breathed

✧ 2 Timothy 3:14–17 ✧

***All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,
rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.***

(2 Timothy 3:16)

The validity of any worship ministry is best judged by its adherence to the Word of God. Styles come and go; trends appear then fade; personal preferences are, well, personal and individual; and traditions vary from one congregation to the next. In the end, none of these determine the ultimate impact of our ministries. Only a fundamental basis and application derived from scripture will suffice.

And that's a really good place to start as we begin looking at significant scripture passages that will help us create and sustain an effective and God-honoring worship ministry. Today's key verse, verse 16, mentions the phrase "God-breathed," or as it says in some translations, "inspired by God." The Greek word used here is *theopneustos*, and it literally means "God-breathed," or "due to the inspiration of God." Many believe that the apostle Paul may well have coined this term, and the overall sense of the verse is that each and every individual scripture is sacred and profitable for teaching, training, and correction.

You see, the messages we convey are important and the words we employ are vital. The musical components of our worship will have lasting effect, and while we all strive for excellence—which does indeed honor God—those we serve will be affected much longer and more deeply by the truths of God's Word than by the perfection of our performance.

*O God, may Your Word be the guiding principle
in our worship as we seek to convey Your
greatness and Your grace. Keep us grounded
in Your truth. Amen*

- How closely does the worship ministry you're involved with adhere to the Word of God?
 - What steps can you take to ensure that this ministry is properly grounded?
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Notes...

9

A Transformed Reality

✦ John 2:1–11 ✦

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

(John 2:11)

I just didn't get anything out of that worship service!"

Ever heard that? Ever said it yourself? One thing I've discovered is that what I, personally, receive in a worship experience depends heavily and directly on what I, personally, put in. My preparation before and my attitude as I approach are often the most important factors in determining how I'll respond in a worship setting. After all, we're not called to receive; we're called to give. Whatever we receive is just the fortunate by-product of responding to God in worship.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus would choose as His first miracle (at least, His first publicly recorded miracle) something so trivial, so "worldly" as turning water into wine? Why in the world wouldn't He have burst onto the scene, dazzling us with some death-defying resurrection, a gravity-ignoring lake-top stroll, or at the very least, a healing? It makes you wonder why He would go with this hedonistic, appeals-to-the-flesh kind of demonstration.

Could it be that God was saying again that something new is about to occur? That we're about to see Him in ways we never could have imagined? Maybe the whole point is this: *Just as the water jars, used for purification rites or ceremonial cleansing, were to be filled with something fresh, our worship rituals are to be emptied and replaced with a brand new filling of Him.*

We could all probably ask ourselves what needs to be re-examined in our corporate and private worship. What trends or liturgies (and we all have them) need to be let go, emptied so that Jesus can fill them with Himself and therefore be clearly and unmistakably seen? Maybe, just maybe, it's time to say confidently and honestly, "The old is gone; the new has come!"

Jesus, please take what is dry and empty in our worship and replace it with a fresh filling of Your Spirit. Help us to see You, clearly and unmistakably, in ways we never have before. Amen

- What aspects of your personal and corporate worship life could be re-examined and replaced with something fresh?
- What aspects seem full of life?

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Preventive Medicine

✦ 2 Chronicles 33:10–13 ✦

***In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God
and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.***
(2 Chronicles 33:12)

It lies at the root of many of our disagreements. It's the origin of many a person's downfall. It's the genesis of the destruction of too many lives to number. Sometimes, it's diagnosed as ambition. On other occasions, it cloaks itself as self-assertion. Then there are instances where it's labeled as a strong work ethic. But all of these are lies.

It's pride, and God's Word condemns it. God's Word also warns against it.

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

(Proverbs 11:2)

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

(Proverbs 16:18)

A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.

(Proverbs 29:23)

...those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

(Daniel 4:37)

It's a subtle and seductive thing, and those who have any sort of public, up-front image are prone to feel it tugging at the ego. Someone hints to us that we're the next greatest thing and suddenly, in our minds, we are, in fact, the next greatest thing. The sad fact is that musicians in the Church are especially vulnerable to this. Music, by its very nature, is "performance" oriented, and performance often leads to comparison or to competition. Then what was once an honorable offering of worship to God becomes infected with the overwhelming desire to be noticed.

Now, ambition, self-assertion, and a strong work ethic aren't necessarily bad things. In fact, scripture also warns against laziness and idleness. These become infections, though, when they mask the desire for attention, the craving for respect, or the insatiable hunger to be the object of envy. And infections lead to diseases. A little preventive medicine would be a good thing.

Lord, convict us when pride and an inflated ego would seek to leave their mark in our ministry. Give us a spirit of humility and an attitude of servanthood. Amen

- What steps can you take to be sure that pride has no place in your ministry and in your personal life?
- What's the difference between self-respect and pride?

Notes...

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The Perfect Wedding

✧ Revelation 19:1–9 ✧

*Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."
(Revelation 19:9)*

Weddings are joyful events for the most part. I say, "for the most part," because, let's face it, they can be daunting as well. There are so many decisions: the perfect date, the ideal location, what music to incorporate, who to involve, who to invite...

And because weddings are serious things, too, the Bible alludes to them in several passages. Jesus likens Himself to a bridegroom in Mark 2:18–20. Paul provides a beautiful analogy of marriage and the Church in Ephesians 5:22–30. And you remember the occasion that prompted Jesus' first recorded public miracle, don't you? (See John 2:1–11.)

Near the end of the book of Revelation (see today's reading), we witness a wedding. The timing is perfect, the location ideal. The music that's incorporated is profound. Those involved include twenty-four elders, four living creatures, and a great multitude in heaven. The celebration is great, and the sound of it all pierces the universe.

And those who are invited? Well, those guests are actually not guests at all. They are the Bride! The Bride of Christ. Christ who is the Groom; the One who loved His Bride and gave Himself for her.

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!" That's what verse 7 implores, and that's to be the attitude at this wedding. The Greek word for "be glad" is *agalliao*, meaning "to exult, to rejoice with exuberance, or *very much to leap*." It's the same word used to describe Jesus Himself in Luke 10:21, and its Hebrew equivalent is found in Isaiah 61:10. This is no somber ceremony. It's a celebration of cosmic proportions.

And why not? Marriages are meant to be forever—'til death do we part. Here's a wedding that's for eternity. Death is no more, and the Bride is joined to her Groom never to part.

So rejoice and be glad! And if you're of a mind to, you're allowed *very much to leap!*

*Lord Jesus, how we long for the day when we, Your Bride, will join
You, our Bridegroom. We rejoice in this promise and abide in Your love. Amen*

- How can this ultimate wedding mentioned in Revelation 19 affect our worship today in the here and now?
- How does tomorrow's anticipation inform today's celebration?

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