

## ***Ministry to the Lord: Our Highest Privilege and Calling***

*Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Turn in your Bibles to Ezekiel 44 if you want to follow along from your own Bibles. I believe that the Holy Spirit wants to reveal to the Body of Christ the revelation of how valuable ministering to God is to God. God greatly values this occupation and this calling before Him. Many in the Body of Christ don't think very much about this subject. It's not a topic that's often discussed. As I've researched it through the Internet and through documents, it was surprising how little material worldwide I could find on the subject of ministering to God. We ask the Lord to strengthen us with understanding of this, because as we understand it, we begin to see why we need to give our strength and our time and our energy to this glorious occupation.

### **WHY DO WE HAVE A TWENTY-FOUR/SEVEN PRAYER ROOM?**

Now I'm asked often why we keep a twenty-four-hour prayer sanctuary, or a "prayer room" as we would call it. It's a worship sanctuary. Why do we keep it going twenty-four/seven? Of course, one of the first reasons is because God spoke audibly to us back in May 1983, and He said this, and it shocked me. It perplexed me. I didn't know how to make sense of it when the Lord first said it. He said, "I will establish twenty-four-hour prayer in the spirit of the tabernacle of David"—with prophetic singers and musicians. I remember being so perplexed by this... *surprising* statement from heaven. He was telling us what our assignment would be as a ministry.

### **THE TWO PRIMARY ASSIGNMENTS OF EVERY MINISTRY**

Now every ministry has the same two primary callings. We're to be engaged in the Great Commission, from the very lips of Jesus, to go and make disciples of the nations (Mt. 28:19-20). The second mandate or calling that every single ministry has is to build the Church. It came from the lips of Jesus: "I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail" (Mt. 16:18, KJV).

So we all have the same two primary callings, but as an expression of our primary calling God gives specific assignments to many ministries across the earth and throughout history. One of our specific assignments—our most important assignment as we're committed to see the Great Commission fulfilled and the building of the Church—is to keep this twenty-four-hour sanctuary of worship and prayer. I mean, it means a lot to God because He emphasized it by speaking audibly to us.

Now I've heard people say, "I would love to have an angel visit or to hear the audible voice of the Lord to receive an assignment. That would be so cool."

Well, there's a downside to this, because God only sends an angel or speaks audibly because you'll need that level of communication to withstand the opposition and the resistance that will eventually come due to that assignment. So if an angel visits and says, "Do this," "Know this," you'll find much trouble in the future doing that assignment. So you want an angelic visitation?

### **THOSE WHO MINISTER WILL EXPERIENCE THE NEARNESS OF GOD**

Now one of the verses that we've looked at over the years that has so many principles involved in it is in Ezekiel 44:15-16. I'm only going to take one or two, but this passage is loaded with spiritual principles. We use

the language from Ezekiel 44:15 to describe what we're doing in the prayer room, or at least part of what we're doing in the prayer room.

The Lord is speaking of the priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of the sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray. They were faithful; they kept charge of the sanctuary when the majority was in compromise. He says, "Tell them that I have a promise, a reward, a blessing for them" (Eze. 44:16, paraphrased). He says, "They will experience the nearness of God as they minister to Me."

Now this passage has so many principles that could be developed, and that's not really what I want to do right now, but I just want to touch a little of what this passage means. First, we see God's desire to be ministered to. Now this was a term we'll see in a moment that He first spoke to Moses. He told Moses, "Tell them that I want them to minister to Me." Here in Ezekiel it's this idea of keeping a sanctuary. What does that mean? That means the work that's involved in maintaining a twenty-four-hour sanctuary; that's what it means to us.

Now a lot of the work is done inside the sanctuary with worship teams up on the platform and people in the chairs and the sound teams that all go together to maintaining the work of ministering to the Lord inside the sanctuary. There's another part of keeping the sanctuary: it's all the support systems that are outside the prayer room that work diligently to provide the environment and the context for that sanctuary to continue.

Now keeping charge of the sanctuary involves the work in it, and it involves the support systems that are outside of the sanctuary itself. Now what the Lord is honoring is this: the sons of Zadok. Now Zadok was a man who lived in the same time as David, which was about a thousand years before the birth of Christ. Ezekiel lived about 500 years before that event. So we have Ezekiel giving a promise about Zadok's great-, great-, great-, great-grandchildren 500 years after Zadok lived. He said, "There's something about his family line. They had unusual diligence and faithfulness related to keeping the sanctuary, and the keeping of the sanctuary was so important to God." God has a special blessing for them and that's this: that they would minister to God and experience His nearness.

### **TO BE FAITHFUL IN THE MIDST OF OPPOSITION REQUIRES GREAT FORTITUDE**

Now if this verse is understood in its full context, it's talking about the offspring of the sons of Zadok in the millennial kingdom, in the age to come, that there would be a generational blessing upon their children because of their faithfulness. The blessing would be nearness to God. Now those who were faithful in the age to come will have resurrected bodies, and they won't have the same assignment as their natural offspring as they're ministering to the Lord with their natural bodies in the millennial kingdom. He didn't describe what the promise would be directly, to the individuals who were faithful, but we know that it has to do with a greater capacity to experience nearness to God in this age as well as in the age to come. That's a big topic.

He says this: "They were faithful when the majority in Israel were compromising and went astray from Me." To be faithful in the context of spiritual opposition and resistance requires great fortitude.

### **GIRD YOURSELF TO WITHSTAND OPPOSITION FROM THOSE WHO DON'T BELIEVE**

Now this verse is about much more than our little thing here in Kansas City, but most of you have someone in your life back home who's wagging his head saying, "Why are you wasting your life and your time doing that prayer thing?" You know a little of what it means to endeavor to be diligent in the face of opposition even from

the people of God. Because the spiritual culture wasn't fully in agreement with this kind of radical engaging of their life to keep that sanctuary.

Well, in terms of our spiritual community, God told us to do this audibly. So we know it's important to God, and we know it will have obstacles. That's why He spoke audibly. So we gird ourselves to withstand the obstacles, not just from other people but even the difficulty of the work itself. It's hard keeping this twenty-four-hour sanctuary. I've never done anything in ministry, in thirty-five years of ministry, that has been so taxing as keeping this sanctuary going. I thought I was changing my ministry focus from pastoring to just sitting in the presence of God and enjoying Him all day, every day for the rest of my life. I thought, "This is going to be awesome!" It was a great surprise. It was far more work than pastoring a church. It was a divine surprise. But I have no regrets. If I had to do it over again, I would do it over again, but I was surprised by the workload.

I'm encouraged by this: if you think our workload is tough, imagine what it was like to keep a sanctuary back in the generation of David, a thousand years before the birth of Christ. I mean, those singers and musicians had no sound system. They had no electricity, so there were no lights in the room. It was lit up by lamps. They had no running water. They had no transportation systems. They all had to walk. They lived in houses a lot different from the ones we live in. They didn't shower every day. You do the math. A lot of people came in to do their worship sets, and it was a bad hair day, and they hadn't had a shower for a few weeks. There was no air conditioning when it was 100 degrees out.

The work of the sanctuary was singers and musicians, and in addition they offered animal sacrifices in the morning and in the evening. I look at that and I say, "Lord, that was the old covenant. They didn't have the Spirit in the way that we have the Spirit. They had so much more difficulty."

And the Lord says, "But it moved Me, their faithfulness to follow through in their own personal obstacles," in just the difficulty of doing it as well as the opposition they undoubtedly had to withstand from the people of God in the nation of Israel.

Well, why do we do it? Well, He told us to do it by the audible voice of the Lord. It tells us, again, how dear it is and how important it is to Him, but how difficult that we should be braced to press through—not just the obstacles of others, but our own natural tendency to lethargy and barrenness and dullness. We would have to contend to be faithful long-term with this assignment. Now we do it.

Here's what we do in the prayer room, in the sanctuary: we minister to God. Again, this was a revelation we'll develop in a moment that God first gave Moses. We declare His worth. We're a witness in a small way on earth to the worship that goes night and day in heaven. I mean, all the prayer and worship ministries in the earth are a witness to that. We in a very weak and broken way are giving a witness on earth in our frailty and weakness to what goes on around the throne of God. Night and day they minister to Him around the throne.

### **WE LABOR IN INTERCESSION FOR THE RELEASE OF THE POWER OF GOD**

Number two: we labor in intercession for the release of the power of God. Now it's interesting that all four of these things are activities we will do forever, even with a resurrected body. With a resurrected body we will minister to God in the age to come. Even with a resurrected body we will still make intercession—not to drive the devil off the planet, because he won't be on the planet, but the power of God and the increase of His kingdom will continue forever and ever, but it will be released by intercession.

Jesus lives forever to make intercession (Heb. 7:25). We will never graduate from these four activities. Next, when we're in the prayer room we have the opportunity to grow in revelation of the Word. We gain insight into His Word, His will, His ways, His plan of salvation, and His global purposes. We gain insight into the Word. Then, number four: we grow in intimacy with God. We encounter the beauty and the majesty of God as our Father and of the Lord Jesus as our Bridegroom God. We touch His heart. We see who we are to Him. We see a little more of His grandeur and His greatness.

Now some people take these four activities and pit them against each other, and we don't need to do that. You know, one guy says, "I'm really into ministering to God. I don't really care about the intercession."

A lot of people have told me over the years, "I'm really into intercession. Why do you guys spend so much time with those syrupy little love songs, saying, 'I love You, God,' 'I love You, God'? I mean, let's get back to the business of doing the war, to the really practical things!"

Some people say, "You know, it's not the worship; it's not even the releasing of justice and power and the great harvest and the revival, but encountering God in the Word." I mean, they could go hours a day just growing in the knowledge of the Word. Other people just like to cry as they touch God and understand who they are to God. I want to tell you this: Jesus has ordained all four of these, and we will do them forever. We don't have to pit them against one another; all four of are essential. You don't have to pick what your favorite is: your heart, your liver, or your kidneys. You get to have all of them.

So some folks debate about this. I say, "Oh, stop it! Let's do all of these God-valued, God-ordained activities with all of our heart, knowing that in different seasons one of these may have a greater emphasis in the grace of God to you than the others. Then in the season that follows the emphasis may change."

### **THE LEVITES STOOD BEFORE THE LORD AND BLESSED HIS NAME**

Let's look at Roman numeral II. Deuteronomy 10. Deuteronomy 10:8-9. Moses is talking. He's referring back to what happened when they came out of bondage in Egypt. He's rehearsing the story. He reminds them in verse 8 of how the Lord separated the tribe of Levi. Now this was a surprising revelation to Moses. Here's what the Lord said about the tribe of Levi: "They should stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless His name" (Deut. 10:8, paraphrased).

Now one of the primary ways we minister to God is by blessing His name. In the New Testament we use the word *worship* a lot more than we use the phrase "ministry to God," but it's actually the same word in most instances. They can be used interchangeably.

But God surprises Moses and tells him that of all the twelve tribes, this one tribe of Levi has a particular calling, and He's separating them to minister to Him. "They're to stand in My presence and declare to Me the glory of who I am" (Deut. 10:8b, paraphrased). "Whatever they discover about Me, they're to proclaim it back to Me with gratitude and with affection."

Now I'm guessing this greatly surprised Moses. Because no one had ever talked in the Scriptures about a lifestyle, a vocation, a life calling of ministering to God as their primary occupation. Well, it's not the only thing they did, but it was one of the primary things that they did.

**“THE LEVITE HAS NO PORTION OR INHERITANCE WITH HIS BRETHREN”**

Now in verse 9, the Lord went and warned Moses, or braced him to go and tell the tribe of Levi. He said, “Go and tell them this. At first it will seem like a negative, but it’s not. Tell them that they don’t have any property inheritance in the land” (Deut. 10:9, paraphrased).

They’ve just come out of Egypt. They’ve just spent forty days in the desert.

They’re about to enter the land of Israel at the end of the forty years, and when they go to the land of Israel, the other eleven tribes are all given property for each tribe and family. So eleven of the tribes received property. That property enhanced their accumulation of wealth as the generations unfolded. But there’s only one of the twelve that didn’t receive the same economic opportunity. They didn’t get the ownership of land.

So Levi is thinking, “Wait a second! That’s a distinct disadvantage. You’ve given us this calling to stand and minister before You, but there’s a huge economic downside to this.”

Then the Lord says to Moses, in essence, “Tell them this, though, that in a very special way I Myself will be their inheritance.” Basically, they were getting the better deal! It might not have looked like it, but when all was said and done, they would be very glad He had given them this assignment.

Now in the general sense the Lord is the inheritance of every believer. But the Lord gives some people ministry assignments like this one—and there are others as well—to minister before God, and that very assignment causes you to lose economic opportunities and advancement in other things.

The Lord says, “I understand that your obedience to that assignment in the natural has a negative. But know this: the positive is far more glorious than the negative. Because though I’m the inheritance of all My people, they’ll experience it in a very near and dear way in their hearts. So tell them I Myself will be near them. I will be their very inheritance.”

Let’s look at paragraph B. The whole nation of Israel has just been brought out of Egypt by Moses. The Lord is speaking more about this subject of ministering to God. In Exodus 28 He tells Moses, “Take your brother Aaron, your older brother, and take his four sons, and there’s a special thing I want you to do with them. Tell them that I’ve called them—Aaron and his four sons and all of their children through all the coming generations. I’ve given them this special assignment: they will minister to Me as priests” (Ex. 28:1, paraphrased).

Aaron has no background whatsoever in being a priest. He has no knowledge this is going to happen. This is a surprise assignment. Verse 3. God says, “Consecrate him that he would minister to Me as a priest” (Ex. 28:3, paraphrased). Then He says it again in verse 4: “Make him holy garments, that he may minister to Me as a priest” (v. 4, paraphrased). He actually says it four times in this passage: “Tell Aaron he will minister to me as a priest.”

Again, I imagine Moses saying, “My brother is going to be a little confused by this calling. He had no anticipation of it. I don’t think he knows what to do. What do You mean minister to You? Because that’s what I’m to tell my brother is his future assignment.”

Well, they figured it all out, but the point I want to make here is that we see the emphasis and the value that God places on ministering to God. This isn't a small thing to God. The fact that they ministered to God around His throne in heaven forever tells you a little about how important ministry to God is. It wasn't enough that God had those around His throne who would minister to Him night and day: He wanted an expression of it on the earth. He wanted Aaron and his sons and all of their children to lead in this focus of a lifestyle of ministry to the Lord.

### **THE LORD IS MOVED BY THE WAY HE MOVES US**

Top of page two. Now what does it mean to minister to the Lord? Well, there are several things involved, but the primary thing that it means is what we would call *worship*. Sometimes we can lose the real meaning of what worship is. I like this intensely personal phrase that God used, "Minister to Me," because "when I reveal Myself to you and it moves your heart and you tell Me what you've discovered about Me, I'm moved by how much you're moved by Me."

I mean, God is touched with us even in our weakness. We come before Him and say, "Holy is the Lord. Worthy is the Lamb." It may not move us that deeply, but it does a little. The Lord is actually moved by the way that He moves us. He's actually touched when we express the way that He has touched us. There's this dynamic interaction: there's an emotional dimension that I believe is inherent in this phrase "minister to Me."

### **"I WILL EXTOL YOU, MY GOD, O KING; AND I WILL BLESS YOUR NAME FOREVER"**

Well, Psalm 145 describes the details of ministry to the Lord better than any other passage I know in the Bible. Then I would add 1 Chronicles 16; I would put it right alongside this. Let's look at this really quickly. First, David is writing this. What do we do when we minister to God? "I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever" (Ps. 145:1). We will make much of Him. We will declare back to God what we have discovered about God from His Word or from observation or the direct teaching of the Holy Spirit. We'll declare back to God what we see about Him.

So verse 1 tells us what we do. Verse 2 tells us how often we do it. "Every day I will bless You and praise You, and I won't just do it day by day in this age, but forever, day by day, in the age to come."

### **WE WILL NEVER FULLY UNDERSTAND THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S GREATNESS**

I have no doubt that David was writing this psalm to equip and motivate and stir up and fuel the singers and musicians and Levites in his generation. Verse 3 really summarizes what ministry to God is and how it functions.

Verse 3 tells us how to sustain ministry to God. Now this is one of the great statements in Scripture. King David is writing, again, and we find this mentioned four times in the Old Testament, this phrase, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised" (1 Chron. 16:25; Ps. 48:1, 96:4, 145:3). "His greatness is unsearchable" (Ps. 145:3b)—it's inexhaustible! We will never, ever understand the fullness of God's greatness.

Well, this phrase, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised," summarizes ministry to God as clearly as any phrase I know in the Bible, and it explains how to sustain this in our lives. There's so much packed into that one phrase! I mean, a library of books could be written to expound on that one phrase, "Great is the Lord"—or you could say, *transcendent*. "Transcendent is the Lord." Transcendent means more than the best. To be transcendent means more than to be better than everyone else. It means to have infinite, infinite superiority to everything that exists. It belongs in another order, in an entirely different category. God is transcendent in His

greatness. His love is infinitely superior to any love that exists; His wisdom, infinitely superior. It's great. It's transcendent. His power is infinitely superior. It's transcendent.

Again, David mentions here in verse 3 that this transcendence of God in all of His attributes is unsearchable, or inexhaustible. We will never fully search it out. A million years from now we will still be searching out new discoveries of His greatness. I mean, what a statement. Now verse 5 gives us more detail on this. Verse 5 really tells us more about how great is the Lord.

We understand that worship flows out of a response of revelation as to who God is and what God does. Who He is and what He's done are really two sides of the same coin. Who God is is expressed by what He does. Some people set those apart and say, "I'm really into who God is, not so much what He does." That's an unnecessary division and argument. Because what God does is a perfect expression of who He is, and visa versa.

### **THE MORE WE SEE, THE MORE WE'RE DRAWN TO WORSHIP**

Here David says it really clearly: "I will meditate on the splendor of Your greatness, of who You are" (Ps. 145:3). Why do we meditate on it? Because we search it out little by little, because it takes engaging our mind and going after it, because we don't automatically see His greatness just at a glance. In order to recognize it and connect with it, we meditate, we study it, we search it out, we go after it. Here's the relationship: the more we see about Him, the more motivated we are to worship. Because worship is a response to a revelation of who He is. So the reason this is important in our context is because it's easy in the twenty-four-hourness of what we do. You know, the full-time staff attend twelve two-hour sessions a week. It's part of our vocation. It's part of our job. It's our occupation. We're not Levites, because that was in the Old Testament, but He has given us the assignment to incorporate this as a major part of our vocation. I mean, it's what we do as our occupation. We do other things outside of the prayer room, but what we do in the prayer room and supporting the prayer room is dynamic to our assignment in God, day by day and year by year.

You know, we've been doing it for thirteen years, and we still have a good number of people who have been with us for twelve or thirteen years. It's really easy after a few years to get lost in the mundanity of it, and the over-familiarity with the prayer room, where we can be in the prayer room fulfilling our commitments but not engaging with God at all. It's really easy to do because we're broken, weak human beings. I'm not saying that even as a criticism. I'm saying that as an observation in my own life, as well as a spiritual family. That's one of the obstacles we have to resist constantly: our natural dullness and over-familiarity with the prayer room and forgetting what we're to do in the prayer room, and that being to minister to God.

So you can be up on the platform, a singer or musician, and know all the language, and never, ever interact with God while on the platform. But here's the problem, and I know it because I've experienced it. I've had times of brightness in God and I've had times of dullness in God in these thirteen years. I've had to sign back up to minister to God. Over and over I have to do that, because I easily drift from it and get captured in the work of the missions base, and I lose site of the core reality of ministering to God. So I have to sign back up; all the time I have to do this.

Here's the issue I'm addressing. If we're not actually growing in revelation of God in our private times where we open the Word, whether we're in the prayer room or home or somewhere else; if we're not actually growing in the Word and talking to God while we're in the prayer room, that prayer room becomes unbearable. It becomes a burden that we try to escape.

I talk to people all the time—not the majority, but there’s always around 10 percent, and I understand this because I’ve been part of that 10 percent a few times. There’s always around 10 percent in any given year. It’s always a different group that’s trying to find a way out of doing the prayer room so much. For example, a few here and there on the worship teams will say, “Can we do fewer sets? I don’t want to do so many sets!” I get it! Or different ones in the departments will say, “Can we do less in the prayer room?” I get it! You know why? Because I’ve done it!

They’re in the room, but they’ve lost sight of why they’re in the room and they’re not talking to God while they’re in the room. So they’re disconnected, but they’re fulfilling their obligation timewise on the platform or in the room. Therefore the prayer room becomes a burden to them. The answer is not to do fewer hours and change the occupation to which God called us. The answer—verse 5—is to get a greater revelation of who He is.

Because when I see a little more about Him, then it’s sustainable to talk to Him about who He is.

Well, paragraph C. Let’s read this. To minister to God includes worshiping Him. It includes meditating on Him. I’ve just described it. It includes interceding or praying for the breakthrough of God. Look at Joel 2. The priests, those who minister to the Lord, are weeping between the porch and the altar (Joel 2:17). *Weeping* means they’re interceding for the breakthrough of the favor and the power of God. So they’re crying out to God in a time of calamity that power and favor would break in. This is intercession. This is an expression of ministry to God.

Now it’s good to know that all the work in the prayer room, and all the work outside the prayer room that supports the prayer room—the shuttles, the accounting, the IT department, the media team; so many different ministries are all in the Old Testament sense considered part of keeping the sanctuary, and they’re all considered part of ministering to God. Those who are in the support systems, you minister to the Lord and keep the sanctuary by driving the shuttles, etc. The maintenance team, the security team... I mean, I could go on and on. You also keep the sanctuary by sitting in the room and talking to God directly. So you keep it in two senses. Most of us keep the sanctuary in the room, and we have support work or outreach work we do outside of the room.

### **WE USE THE BEST OF OUR STRENGTH TO OFFER GOD PRAISE**

Let’s look at paragraph D. Now David had an unusual, extravagant response to praising God in a great way. Because great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. David wrote that! Here’s what it means. It means we use the best of our strength. We use the best of our strength to offer God praise individually and corporately. We put a lot of money in it. We put a lot of effort in it. We seek to have excellence. Our worship teams practice and train. Our Bible teachers study and prepare. I mean, all of the excellence and the wholeheartedness, all of that is involved in praising God greatly—praising God with all of our strength. We’re not trying to get by with something: “Well, we’ll praise You a little and get back to You later.” We want Him praised to the greatest measure that we can with the strength that we have; our time, our energy, our talents, our money. We want Him praised at the greatest level that our strength can afford.

That’s what David said. Well, David put it into action, because here in 1 Chronicles 16 he appointed Levites. Well, he didn’t appoint just a few. He paid over 8,000 full-time Levites to keep that sanctuary. I mean, that was intense. I can imagine David going to the other leaders of the nation after he had the revelation. He came in and said, “I have a new revelation. We’ll pay the Levites. They’ll minister before the ark of the covenant.”

Now the ark of the covenant was a rectangular box, a little bigger than this pulpit, actually. It was covered in gold, and quite small. It was in the Holy of Holies and the glory of God rested on it. It represented on earth the throne of God in heaven. So when David had them minister before that rectangular, little box, he understood and they understood that they were before the throne of God, and they were ministering to God.

Now David had them commemorate—or *remember*—God’s works. Number two, they were to thank Him for them, and number three, they were to praise Him. They were to declare the majesty and the grandeur and the glory of who God is. They were to do those three things. Verse 37: they were to do it regularly, every day, as their full-time occupation. Verse 32: they were to add music to their praise and declaration about God.

### **DAVID WAS GIVEN A DIVINE COMMAND TO KEEP THE WORSHIP GOING**

Now here’s what David said: he said they served in their office according to their order. Those are two very key phrases. David established under the Holy Spirit’s direction, under God’s guidance, an office of the full-time singer and musician and the gatekeepers who supported the sanctuary. He established a new order in the kingdom of God in Israel in his generation. I mean, a new kingdom order was identified and validated and recognized by the whole nation. So there was an office: there was a dignified, God-ordained, God-commanded office of the full time singer and musician, and it was to fulfill a new order in the kingdom that God revealed to David.

Now David required that this happen because he said God commanded him to do this. He commanded him to tell everyone after him, “You must do this.” In 2 Chronicles 29:25, which I don’t have on the notes, God commanded David to command Israel for the next 1,000 years, right up to the time of Christ; during those thousand years, Israel was under this divine command to keep the office and the order of the full-time singer and musician, as well as others that participated in keeping the sanctuary. I mean, that’s an amazing reality.

Now sometimes young people will join us, and I appreciate this. They want to join because they love good music. They’re musicians, and they want to be in an environment for their musical creativity to increase, and this is a good environment for that. You’ll get a lot of practice and a lot of chance to work that muscle. But there’s more than good music and growing in creativity and skill. That’s good. I like that. But there’s more. We’re called not just to have good music, cool people, and good coffee next door at the coffee shop. We’re actually called to minister to God. That’s the point.

Remember, this was a new concept. David could have said to these new ones, these full-time singers, “Don’t forget: it’s not mostly about growing in your instrument and making new music, although that’s good. It’s mostly about the person that we’re talking to in the sanctuary.”

### **WORSHIP IS THE CONTEXT THAT WILL LAUNCH AND SUSTAIN MISSIONS**

Paragraph E. Now we understand that ministry to God wasn’t just an Old Testament concept. It’s a New Testament concept as well. In Acts 13, Paul the apostle and Barnabas and the other leaders were ministering to the Lord. In the New Testament we call it worship and prayer. They were worshiping, magnifying God with fasting; it’s called ministry to the Lord. This is the context that launched the great mission movement in church history. Because in Acts 13 the Spirit set aside Barnabus and Saul—which you know as Paul the apostle; Saul was his name before he was converted, and then after his conversion he changed his name to Paul. The Holy Spirit set them apart for work. This is more than just a ministry outreach. The entire missions movement in church history began right here. Here’s my point: ministry to God is the context that will most effectively

launch and sustain the missions movement. That's the message that I believe the Spirit intends that we understand by reading Acts 13.

In Acts 6 the apostles said they had to draw back from some of the responsibilities they were engaged in. These were good ministry responsibilities. Why did they have to draw back? Because they were to be more continually focused on ministering to the Lord, in prayer and the ministry of the Word. There was a divine adjustment, a divine correction of the apostolic team. They were to be engaged in other necessary ministries, and the Lord was saying to them in Acts 6, "Reconsider, recalibrate, and understand. I called you to continual prayer, that in the Old Testament was called 'ministry to the Lord.'" They all understood those passages.

### **A CALLING TO REPRESENT GOD AS MINISTERS AND PRIESTS**

Paragraph F. 1 Peter 2:9. After the resurrection of Jesus, after He rose from the dead, now every born-again believer is a part of the priesthood. Every single one of us has a new identity the day we're born again. We're priests. What that means is that we have the awesome privilege, but we have the responsibility to minister to God and then to represent Him well. That's what being a priest means. It's more than that, but that's just a summary. We have the privilege of ministering to God as priests, because Peter's frame of reference was the Old Testament priesthood, and they were mandated to minister to God before anything else. It's more than that.

We represent God well. We're representatives of Him. Now here's the point I'm making. Every believer—not just house of prayer, full-time staff people—but every believer, around the world—and there are houses of prayer springing up so fast around the world, and so many of them are developing this idea of the full-time singer and musician and intercessor. I mean, it's a God thing. It's taking root worldwide. Multitudes are being stirred and gripped by this reality of the full-time singer, musician, and intercessor being established in this generation. You don't have to be one of those to be a priest and to have ministering to God as your primary calling.

God calls most people in the kingdom to the marketplace or the home. Not very many are called to be on a "house of prayer" staff, but we're all called to minister to the Lord and to represent Him well.

### **CALLED TO REPRESENT AND RELEASE HIS WORKS IN THE EARTH**

Now this is foundational to our identity and to our life calling. We look at prayer and worship and we say, "No, we know it's biblical." I mean, it's in the Bible clearly. Jesus did it a lot. It's undeniable.

"But in this kind of Western culture of productivity and efficiency, how practical is it? I mean, we have a business, we have problems, we have troubles that need to be fixed, and let's be realistic."

That's a Western, pragmatic approach to this awesome eternal identity we have. It's the most foundational reason we exist and why we're born again, to be part of God's family as the Bride of Christ and the children of God: to function before Him as priests and then to go forth in partnership with Him and to represent and release His works into the earth.

Now we do that in the marketplace; we do that in our homes, to release His works into the earth. This idea of ministering to God is lost on many people.

They don't even think about that. They try to squeeze in a little prayer and worship in the course of a week. If the week isn't too busy, they'll put some in because they don't have the revelation that their fundamental identity is to be a priest. That's actually their number one calling in this age and the age to come. We need

revelation of ministering to God, of how valuable and central it is to God's heart and to His kingdom purposes in this age and the age to come. I mean, it literally takes revelation of what ministry is to God, to see how valuable it is to God and how central it is to His work and how foundational it is to our identity as believers.

You don't have to be on a staff in a house of prayer to minister before the Lord. We don't just throw a little in if we get a little time. Rather we go the other way. We turn down opportunities to increase our own sphere, because we won't take our ministry-to-God time and just develop more opportunities for our life. We're actually going to live with some restraints because we get how critical this is to God, to His kingdom, and to our identity as His people.

Now look at Isaiah 56. This is a main house-of-prayer verse. Most of us in this room are foreigners, Gentiles, who join ourselves to the Lord. In other words, we're born again. Now look at the two ways that Isaiah describes the people joined to God, or the born-again Gentile. They minister to God and they love God's name. Those are the two most fundamental descriptions of who we are as the people of God. We minister to God and we love His name. This is the foundational identity—verse 7—of the house of prayer. I'm not going to develop that further, because we know the verse.

### **GOD IS THE ETERNAL FOUNTAIN OF LOVE AND DESIRE**

Let's look at page three. God is love (1 Jn. 4:16). The nature of God is love. Paragraph A. Now we won't go through much more of this, but worship is an end in itself. I mean, God is worthy of our most extravagant, continual declarations of His greatness. But it's more than that. It doesn't stop there, but that's an end in itself. If it did stop there, that would be good enough, but because of the nature of who God is, He's love. He's an eternal fountain of love and desire. That's His nature. He's the consummate, eternal, generous love in His personality.

Here's my point: He isn't just a stoic God who has all power, but He's the most relational being in existence. He's the most loving being. Beloved, He's a really good communicator. He's the most expressive being in existence. I mean, just look at creation and see His creativity and expression. Here's my point: we go before a God with that kind of personality and we say, "Worthy is the Lord." I tell you, when we touch love, love responds in love and awakens more love in us. We can't touch that consuming bonfire of love without it marking us with love. We can't go before Him with adoration and love and say, "Worthy," and offer our love without it moving the One who is love Himself.

God loves love. God is moved by love. My point is that as we minister to the Lord, that in itself is worthy, end of story. But it never stops there. Because when we give love to the One who is love, He responds in love in His creative, expressive personality, and I tell you it just goes on and on and on.

### **THE GLORY OF WHO GOD IS DEMANDS A WHOLEHEARTED RESPONSE**

Roman numeral IV. John 4. Jesus says this: He talks about God's desire to be ministered to, because remember, in many places—not every one—the words *worship* and "ministry to God" can be interchangeable words. He declares that the Father is seeking to be worshiped. The Father wants to be worshiped. He wants you to worship Him. He wants this. Now again, it happens in heaven from ages past and will go on for eternity future. The earth will be filled with this in the age to come, but at the very core of the kingdom is the God who seeks to be worshiped.

Now there are several reasons why. He isn't a narcissist, I assure you of that. God doesn't just need more affirmation to feel better about Himself. That's not what is going on. I don't want to go into the several things I believe about why God declares this, besides the glory of who He is demands a response of wholehearted adoration.

Jesus gives us this revelation that the Father is seeking this (Jn. 4:23). Now what does the God who has everything seek for? You have everything: what do You want? I mean, You're all powerful. You can have everything You want except for one thing. There's one thing He doesn't have: the voluntary love of your heart. By the nature and definition of love, He will never take love from you, but will wait until you offer it freely. He seeks for the one thing He doesn't have, and that's all of your love. No one else can give God all of your love; only you can do that. He waits and He seeks, and, being love, He would say to us, "This is of deep value to Me." Again, the very glory of who He is provokes this kind of response.

### **TRUE WORSHIPERS WILL WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH**

You can read this more on your own, but Jesus went on to say, "Those who worship need to worship in spirit" (Jn. 4:24, paraphrased). Here's my point: we need to engage our spirit when we worship. It's easy to be involved in this ministry, in the prayer room on the stage or in the chairs in the prayer room in a professional way, meaning we can learn the language, learn the music, even know the language of prayer and not actually interact with God from our spirit in a personal way. If we do that, again, the prayer room is a burden—if we're logging time in a dutiful way and we're not interacting.

But Jesus said, "I want those who worship Me to be engaged in doing it."

I encourage the bass players and the drummers to talk to God. Don't just play the music; whisper to God. Don't just do the job but actually minister to God on the platform—yes, with your music, but with your spirit engaged as well.

Now it takes effort to exert our mind. That to me is one of the great statements of love. We come in, our mind is tired, we're prone to distraction, we've got a hundred things going, and we stop all the scattered things, we take the reins of our mind, and we make the effort—that effort is an expression of our love. We focus on the Revelation 4-5 throne of God and Him who sits upon the throne.

Now here's a little secret. Someone told me this years ago and I followed it. It worked. My mind is prone to distraction, as all minds are. Some people say, "I have a real problem with that."

I say, "Everyone does." The only person not prone to distraction was Jesus. Every human being, every servant of God is prone to distraction. So don't think you got a worse deal than the other guy. Now you can make a worse case out of it by feeding that, but here's my point. If you'll even whisper, if you'll even slightly utter the phrases to God, your mind will follow your words.

I used to study in the library all the time and my mind would be so distracted. I wanted to pray and meditate, and I would speak just the slightest whisper so that even the guy across the table couldn't hear me. I said, "Jesus, You're worthy." My mind would follow my whisper.

Now I want to encourage the people up here to whisper the phrases that the singers are singing. I encourage the people in the chairs—and I've said this for fourteen years—to whisper to the Lord every third or fourth phrase that the intercessors pray on the microphone. "Lord, release Your power!" Just say the phrase: "Lord, release Your power." I mean, you can't say every phrase because the guy is talking too fast. But every third or fourth phrase, whisper back to the Lord, and when the worship song is going you don't have to sing every word, but speak some of the words, and I tell you this: your mind will follow your words.

### **WE'RE NOT LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO STEAL THE SPOTLIGHT FROM JESUS**

Now here's the point I want to make here: Jesus said the Father is seeking such to worship Him (Jn. 4:23). The whole point of the our ministry, at its core, is that we would worship Him.

Now one of my big values is one that I've been speaking endlessly for thirteen years. I began to say it, and I'll say it like a broken record by the grace of God. We don't want a worship sanctuary where people draw attention to themselves. The Father is seeking people who worship from their spirit. In other words, they actually say the words to Him, but He wants them to worship Him. He doesn't want them in the sanctuary to get people to notice them. We want people to notice God, not us. So I've said for thirteen years, and I say it all the time: I want no antics on the platform. We're not looking for Christian rock stars. That's not what we're after. We're looking for worship teams that lead people to God. We don't lead people to you. Thirteen years later I can say, I'm very blessed and pleased as a spiritual leader at the high quality of this value that our worship teams uphold. I said, "You can get your own little signature moves and do this and that and be like those other teams over there, but you can't do that here. We're not interested in you getting a little following. We're interested in a sanctuary that's focused on Him."

Again, I'm talking about a 99.9 percent success rate—or very close to it. By the grace of God, we have a very high success rate of people buying into that. We've said the same thing in the congregation for thirteen years. The goal in the congregation is to talk to Him, not to draw attention to yourself. We're quite good about that. There's always that one guy and that one gal, but 99 percent really buy this.

When the music is going, you can jump and shout, but here's what I urge you to do. Talk to Him. Shout to Him. Don't shout so that your friends will high-five you because you shouted more loudly than they shouted. Talk to Him. Don't try to get the attention of the people next to you to show them how zealous you are. Show God what He means to you. Talk to Him. Jump before Him, not when everyone is sitting down so that everyone sees you jump. Shout before Him, not when everyone is quiet so they know you shouted.

Talk to Him. So in the sanctuary, on the stage, in the chairs, I tell you, the Lord has blessed us. I believe the Spirit is pleased by that, that we have a value of the reality of what Jesus said, "My Father is seeking those who will worship Him." He's the centerpiece. Or we can say Jesus is the centerpiece. He's the full expression of what the Father is like. So we don't need to separate that issue. It's all about Him. It's not about us. More than that, I want people to come to worship services and actually talk to God, not just work up a sweat, burn off a few calories, and leave unconnected. It takes effort to connect our spirit. We have to lock in and focus to do that, but that's who we are.

Whether we're sitting in the chair in our prayer room, or whether we're at a conference and it's really fun and exuberant, we always want to be talking to Him and not trying to make a point to our neighbor about how zealous we are.

Amen. Let's stand.