

Center of Unbroken Praise

The Worshipping Church Part 2

Revelation 4:1-8a 1-8-2012

Summary: John spends the first 7½ verses of his description of the ultimate worship service describing the glory of the Object of worship. Worship begins seeing (understanding, appreciating, and delighting in) God's glory. Increase congregational worship not by coercion or music, but by showing God's glory. Then use music to showcase that glory. God is awesome and beautiful, so we must respond with delighted fear.

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Revelation 4:1-11 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." 9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever.

Introduction: The Ultimate Worship Service

What should the worship service be like in church? What does the New Testament tell us about the sort of format and procedure we should have in corporate praise? Today is part 2 of our study of corporate praise. Last week we studied the definition of praise, and found out that praise is an emotional expression of joy in God. And we also found out that in the New Testament God commands the Church to come together and praise Him corporately. So now that we know what praise is and that we are supposed to do it corporately, the next question is, “How?” What exactly should we be doing? There are a thousand different traditions – which ways of doing it are biblical? How are we supposed to make decisions about which instruments to use, or whether to use instruments, old songs, new songs, fast songs, slow songs - how much structure and planned liturgy, how much freedom and spontaneity – all the kinds of things people fight over – what does the Bible teach about how to lead worship? What kinds of things can the leaders do to make it more likely that the congregation will offer true praise?

As I was thinking about the best way to approach this study, I have gone back and forth between two approaches. One way would be to just go verse by verse through the key passages in the New Testament about corporate praise so we can understand all the principles. Another approach would be to just show it to you, so you can see it for yourself in action. Up until Thursday morning of this week I was going to take that first approach. I had a whole sermon prepared from Ephesians 5:19. But as I was lying in bed early Thursday morning, I just kept thinking about how much better the second approach would be. Instead of just talking about a bunch of abstract principles, I would like you to be able to just see those principles in action.

So I thought it would be really cool to just go and find a worship service that follows all those principles, get a video of it, and just show you the video. So I did some hunting and I found the service. You are going to love this service I am going to show you – it is amazing. It was planned by the greatest mind in the area of corporate worship alive today – no question. He is brilliant when it comes to planning corporate worship – no one else even comes close. And in this particular service that I am going to show you, he spared no expense. He went all out. He has a large church and seemingly unlimited resources, so he can do pretty much whatever he wants.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get my hands on a video – or the audio. But the transcript of this worship service is available. It is recorded in Revelation 4-5. The brilliant worship Leader who planned this worship service is God. His congregation is the entire creation, which He created for this purpose (like I said, He spared no expense in putting this worship service together). But this morning we are not going to see any actual worship take place. The worship starts in verse 8, but today we are just going to focus on verses 1-7 which describe the stage setup. Actually, it is not a stage. This service is not set up with rows of chairs facing a stage in front. It is actually set up in a circle, around the throne of God in heaven.

My plan in this series is to take you to some exciting places. We are going to stand at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 and smell the smoke and feel the ground shake under our feet. We are taking a field trip right through the curtain into the Holy of Holies in the Temple. We are going to see some amazing things. But we begin this morning with the greatest place there is – the very throne room of God! Normally it is behind closed doors, but look at verse 1.

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. ... 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

One day two thousand years ago God left the door to His throne room cracked open, and He invited John to step inside and permitted him to do what Paul was not permitted to do – write down what he saw up there. This morning and in the weeks to come we are going to witness (and study) the worship service that goes on in the actual throne room of God in heaven! According to Hebrews 12:22, when you come to church and sing you are adding your voice to a choir of thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.

Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly

In the weeks to come we are going to take a look at that assembly.

What Causes Praise?

Seeing God

2 there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

That is the starting place for worship. Last week we took a sneak peak ahead at the explosion of worship at the end of chapter 5 with the huge, heavenly crescendo. But that is not the starting place. The starting place is the throne. When the Lord shows us the ultimate worship service, He begins with all camera angles trained on Him. No one else is in the picture. The first six verses say nothing about anybody but God. There is no mention yet of praise or worship or thanksgiving or anything else – John just describes God in His splendor and glory. He is the center. (I love that line in the hymn “Joyful Joyful” where it refers to God as the “center of unbroken praise.”)

John begins in the center to show us the Object of our worship first. That is important, because all true praise is a response to seeing that glory. If you do not first see the glory, your singing is not praise. All true worship is a response to seeing the glory of God. All true worship is a response to having your eyes opened to understand and appreciate some amazing thing about God. Just look at the Psalms. David’s eyes are opened in a special way to see God as deliverer or refuge, and that thrills David’s heart, and out comes praise. David’s eyes are opened in a special way to see God’s tenderness as a Shepherd – that thrills David’s heart and out comes praise. Seeing something wonderful about God is always the starting place for worship.

And that is true for all kinds of worship - even the elements of worship that are not praise. Sometimes you do not have joy in your heart, and you are dry and distant from God. How did David worship when that happened? Psalm 63 – he directed all his longing toward God. He said, “God, I am dry and weary and broken and empty and my soul hungers and thirst and longs – for YOU! Not relief from suffering, not restoration of my throne, not different circumstances. What my soul aches for is nothing other than Your presence.” That is also worship.

And how does that worship happen? Again, it only happens when your eyes are opened to the glory of God. If you cannot see God as the water and bread of life and the great satisfier of the soul, then it will be impossible to make His presence the object of all your longing and craving. So no matter what kind of worship we are talking about – whether it is the praise of the fulfilled, satisfied heart or the longing of the empty heart, it all must begin with seeing the glory of God.

And that has profound and sweeping implications on how we go about leading the corporate worship service. Our goal in leading the service is to stimulate, assist, and amplify praise, as well as other forms of worship. And the way a praise team or leader does all that is dictated 100% by their understanding of what causes worship in the heart.

Not Coercion

You can tell what a worship leader believes to be the cause of worship in the heart by how he leads. If he believes worship is caused by seeing the glory of God, he will do everything he can to show you the glory of God. But if he believes worship is caused simply by a resolve of the will, he will resort to coercion or manipulation to participate, and it will never work. Leaders like that will get up on the platform and say, “Come on, everyone, sing louder – from the diaphragm. Smile. Stand up. Clap. That’s not loud enough – you can do better than that.” There is a place for giving some corporate direction, and I will talk about that later on. But my point here is that people cannot be coerced or cajoled into worship. If you know how to control a crowd then you can get a congregation to double their volume, and to be more animated. And that might make the praise band feel good because people seem to be responsive to what they are doing. But that is not how you stimulate actual, genuine praise.

Not Music

So one thing that does not cause worship in the heart is cajoling or coercion. Another thing that does not cause worship is ... music. Probably the most common mistake in leading worship, especially among musicians, is to confuse worship with enjoyment of worship music. Very often people think their enjoyment of the music is worship. Musicians love music, and when they hear or play really good music it gives them a feeling that is hard to describe. It is almost euphoria. It is a feeling of happiness and excitement that is so moving that very often that feeling is mistaken for worship. When it happens in the midst of a worship service, and there is really excellent music, and they are just enraptured with joy – they assume that feeling IS worship. It is not. Non-Christian musicians get that same feeling. To mistake that feeling for worship is a grave mistake, and it leads to all kinds of problems.

Thinking Enjoyment of the Music IS Worship Handicaps Worship

For one thing, that error is one of the main causes of the worship wars. If you think that feeling you get from your favorite music equals worship, then when the band is playing music that you do not like, so you do not get any enjoyment from the music, you feel like you are shut out of worship. If worship is the feeling that comes when you enjoy the music, and you cannot enjoy this music, then you cannot worship. And not only that, but if praise is dependent upon enjoying the music, then we can never all worship together in unity, because there is no one style that everyone likes. And the people whose style gets neglected will be up in arms because they think they cannot worship. So mistaking enjoyment of worship music for actual worship causes complaining, grumbling, discontent, and, eventually, fighting and bickering and worship wars in the church.

Thinking Enjoyment of the Music IS Worship Creates Confusion on How to Stimulate Worship

Secondly, if you confuse enjoyment of music with true praise, that will create a fundamental misunderstanding of what causes worship to happen in a person’s heart. Every worship leader wants to do all he can to stimulate the congregation to worship. And if they think worship is enjoyment of the music then their focus is going to be on doing whatever they can to make the music more enjoyable – rather than doing the things that really do cause worship.

Use Music to Showcase God’s Glory

If you want to stimulate worship in a congregation, there is one way to do it – point people to marvelous truths about God. Put their attention on the glory of God and then do whatever you can to

eliminate distractions so their attention stays on the glory of God. That is why we take the approach we take at Agape. Let me read you the purpose statement for the music ministry at Agape: The music ministry exists to showcase truth about God and stimulate, lead, and assist the corporate, congregational response by reading the Scriptures, prayers, instruction, exhortation, and music. The music ministry does not exist for the purpose of getting people to sing louder, or to add more people to our membership, or to increase people's giving, or any of that. Our praise team exists to showcase truth about God and then lead the congregational response to that truth.

That is not to say music is unimportant. We will see as we go that music is crucially important. It is commanded in Ephesians 5:19.

Ephesians 5:19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart

That has got to win the prize for the most musical verse in the entire New Testament. Music is an important part because music has a special ability to showcase truth. Music does not cause worship in the heart – only seeing God's glory does that – but music can be a huge help in showcasing that truth. When you showcase something, you put it in an ideal setting to show off its beauty. If you take something that is beautiful and place it in the wrong setting, it detracts from the beauty. But when you showcase that thing, you place it in a context that best accentuates and highlights and draws attention to its beauty. And music has the ability to do that with the attributes of God. Now, music also has the ability to distract from the beauty of the Lord's glory, so it must be used very carefully. It is not enough for the music to simply be excellent. Really excellent music – perfectly executed music – can distract from God's glory just as much as poorly done music can. We need to be very intentional about how we use music.

OK, so all that is to say that worship is caused by seeing God's glory, and not by music or coercion or any other humanly contrived method. So let's get back to the throne.

Awesome Beauty

3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

Why all the colors? The rainbow of colors and the precious stones illustrate God's beauty.

Ezekiel 1:28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown

God is beautiful. The problem is, He is also invisible. Our physical eyes cannot see God's beauty until that Day we see Him face to face. But until that happens, how do we respond to His beauty with worship and praise? How can you have an emotional response to invisible beauty?

We cannot see God face to face right now, but we can get an appreciation for His beauty because He has plastered illustrations of it everywhere in the creation. Every beautiful thing in the world is the thumbprint of God in the creation. When God made everything in six days and then said, "Behold, it is very good" – that Hebrew word for "good" includes the idea of aesthetic beauty. All beauty, all that is impressive, all that is spectacular or delightful to the eyes in this world points to the nature of God. The stars, sunrises, waterfalls, forests, clouds, mountains, a beautiful woman – all beauty exists for the purpose of enabling us to understand what Psalm 27:4 means by the phrase, **the beauty of Yahweh**.

I made the point that enjoyment of beautiful music is not, in itself, worship. But you can turn it into worship if you draw the connection in your mind between the delightfulness of that music and the glory of God. If you are consciously aware of the fact that any beauty or excellence that you enjoy in the music is enjoyable and delightful because it is the thumbprint of God, that can draw your attention

to God rather than to the music itself. That is how you worship when there is instrumental music with no lyrics.

Now, you need to be careful with that kind of worship, because everyone in the world enjoys beauty. An atheist can be brought to tears listening to beautiful music. That is not worship. And it is very easy for us to experience beauty the same way an atheist does, and then assume our enjoyment of it is worship because we are so moved. One way to know if that is happening in your case is if God's beauty and power seem to be the only attributes that move your heart. When something is beautiful or spectacular, you say, "That makes me joyful in the Lord's beauty and power!" – but when you consider His eternity or holiness, it has no emotional impact; that is a sign that your enjoyment of the beautiful things is not really worship.

Awesome Beauty

The Elders

4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

There are all kinds of debate about who these elders are. One side says, "They can't be angels because they are always distinguished from angels. They must be humans." The other side says, "No, they can't be humans, because they are always distinguished from the saints." And both sides are right - they are distinguished from angels and the saints. I studied and studied, read the arguments for the various positions, checked into the Old Testament background, studied the Greek word, etc. And after all that, I came up with a theory on who these twenty-four are. Actually it is not just a theory. I am going to tell you for certain exactly who the elders are, and there is no chance I am wrong. Are you ready? Here is my view: They are... elders. That much I can say for sure

What does the word, "elder" mean? That word had two uses: it can refer to an older person, or it can refer to a ruler or leader. Which is it here? Well, where are they seated? Thrones. And what do they have on their heads? Crowns. So since the word elder can mean ruler, and since they sit on thrones, and since they have crowns, I am going to go way out on a limb and guess that they are rulers of some kind. What kind? We know they are not humans or angels. Does that leave any other category? Is it possible that God created some spiritual beings that are rulers? Not only is that possible, we know it for a fact.

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities

Where are these thrones and rulers? Ephesians 3:10 refers to the **rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms**. Are these angels, or are they distinct from angels? According to 1 Peter 3:22, all the angels, authorities and powers are in submission to Jesus Christ. So the Bible repeatedly talks about powers and authorities and thrones and rulers that are in heaven and that are not angels. So this is not hard. The twenty-four elders are twenty-four elders – spiritual authorities in the heavenly realms that are distinct from angels. Maybe they are in charge of ruling over the angels until we take that job over.

And they probably serve here in the worship service to represent us. In 1 Chronicles 24 all the masses were represented in worship by twenty-four rulers. And Hebrews 8:5 says they served at a sanctuary that was a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. Those twenty-four leaders representing the people of Israel in worship were a picture of the twenty-four rulers in the heavenly Temple who, no doubt, represent us.

But what is important here is the fact that they are enthroned powers – awesome, glorious, exalted heavenly authorizes. They are royalty in heaven, and their presence here serves to showcase how

glorious God is. The exalted kings of the heavenly realms surround God as His entourage. But they are not the only ones in His entourage.

The Living Creatures

6 In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures

These are the great cherubim – the most exalted creatures we know of. They are referred to various places in the Old Testament, and they always appear around the throne of God.

6 ...and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.

The picture is of them guarding the throne, and nothing escapes their view. They have total awareness.

7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.

The point here is that they represent the fastest, strongest, most intelligent, and most majestic of the created order. These creatures apparently surpass every other created thing in greatness. They are *awesome* beings. In the Old Testament Temple, the miniature earthly replicas of them are fifteen feet high. They move at the speed of lightening, and light shoots out from them all the time. This is what surrounds God's throne.

The Atmosphere

5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.

God's throne is a loud, flashing, frightening place. One of the things that strikes me is how different the biblical descriptions of heaven are from the descriptions of the people who supposedly die and go there and come back. The picture here is not a light, fluffy, dreamy experience with angels lying around strumming harps on marshmellowy clouds and Jesus sitting around cracking jokes or talking about trivia. When you read the biblical descriptions of the throne room, the last word that comes to mind is "serene." It is loud, it is bright, there are awesome, breathtaking heavenly beings, fire, brilliant colors, blinding, flashing lights, thunderous sound – it makes the wildest action movie you have ever seen look like a mortuary. If you go there and see that without a glorified body you end up like John – passed out from fear.

Now, that is not to say it is chaotic. It is spectacular and beautiful and awesome, but not chaotic.

6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

The ancient people thought of the sea as the abode of chaos. The pagans believed that the gods managed to push the forces of chaos into the sea, so the gods could establish some order on land, but not even the gods could tame the chaos of the sea. But here God is pictured as presiding over a sea of glass. Everything in His jurisdiction (which is everything everywhere) is perfectly subdued and under His complete control. There is not one maverick molecule in existence.

Delighted Fear

What is the point of all that? Why all these verses about the awesome atmosphere surrounding God's throne? First we saw His beauty, then we see that it is an awesome beauty. What does that teach us about how we are to worship God in our corporate praise time?

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a

consuming fire."

How do you respond to awesome beauty? With delighted fear. If God is both beautiful and awesome, then we should respond with both delight and fear. Delighted fear says, "You are so awesome I am shaking in my boots, but You are so beautiful and good that I still desire nothing more than to be near You." Last week I made a huge point about the role of joy in worship. Joy is the foundation, but do not misconstrue that to justify approaching God in a casual, over-familiar, flippant way. Our corporate praise should be joyful, but not chipper. If there is anything that turns my stomach it is a pastor who constantly keeps smiling even when he is talking about hell. Our worship should be driven by joy, but it should not be light-hearted in any sense. It should be heavy – weighty – serious.

The word **reverence** in Hebrews 12:28 is used only one other time in the New Testament and it is in Hebrew 5:7, where that reverence is expressed in prayers and loud cries and tears. The other word is **awe**. Awe a mixture of reverence, fear and wonder. It is fearful and profound respect inspired by greatness, superiority, and grandeur, and suggests an immobilizing effect. We speak sometimes of being in stunned amazement – that is the idea. Stunning, humbling, serious – no place for silliness or frivolity. Many times in Scripture the word "fear" is used as a synonym for worship.

I want to create the most joyful atmosphere we can possible create here during our praise time, but I do not ever want us to approach anywhere near irreverence. C.S. Lewis was right – God is good, but He is not safe." God has killed Christians in the New Testament age for worshipping Him the wrong way. He put people in Corinth to death for taking communion lightly. He made a man and his wife drop dead on the spot for lying about how much they gave to the church. Aaron's sons got a little creative in their method of worship and God sent fire from heaven and incinerated them on the spot.

1 Peter 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in fear.

Even the great and awesome seraphim have to cover their faces in the presence of God. When God created them He even had to design their anatomy to give them an extra pair of wings to protect themselves from God's glory. What an awesome Being God is!

Exodus 33:18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ...20 "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

So God hides Moses in a cliff and lets him just get a glimpse of that backside of God's glory.

29 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai ...he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him

How awesome and fearful and overwhelming is the glory of God? Just the residual reflection off a human face that was hidden in a rock and got a momentary, split-second, backward glance when the back of God's glory passed by in a limited way; and it is enough to terrify the people of God – just that infinitesimal speck of God's glory.

Habakkuk 2:20 LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.

3:2 I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, 3 God came...4 His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.

6 He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal.

10 the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its

waves on high.

This is why we sing “Shout to the LORD ...mountains bow down and the seas will roar at the sound of Your name.”

11 Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows

This is describing God’s act of saving Israel.

13 You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one.

God is coming to deliver Israel! But look at Habakkuk’s response:

16 I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled.

Why? If God is coming to save and deliver and rescue, why all the trembling and shaking and heart-pounding? Because yes, God is coming to save Israel, but that means - God is *coming*. Even though He is coming to save – if you have insight like the prophet had into how awesome He is, even the coming that you look forward to and long for makes you tremble.

Job 25:2 Dominion and awe belong to God

Psalms 119:120 My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 and fear came upon every soul

Did you know that to fail to be in awe of God is to forsake Him?

Jeremiah 2:19 Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of me," declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty.

Simultaneous fear and intimacy

Now I know this is a hard concept for a lot of you because you have never experienced the good kind of fear – only the bad kind. When you think of fearing someone all you can think of is the kind of fear where you are afraid someone is going to do something bad to you. That kind of fear makes you want to run from the person you fear. That is the bad kind of fear. If your fear of God makes you hesitant to approach Him, that is the bad kind.

But that is not the only kind of fear. There is another kind. There is a kind of fear that attracts you to the one you fear. And there are a few ways to illustrate that in the natural world.

Attraction to Awesome Things in the Creation

One would be our desire to be around awesome things. You go to the Grand Canyon and you want to go right up to the rim. You want to get as close as you can to Niagara Falls. There is something in us that loves to be dwarfed by awesome things – to stand next to something that just makes you shudder. God built us with an appetite to be awed, and He is really the only one who can fulfill that appetite. We try to come up with substitutes – movies that can get us caught up in some pretend awe, or huge things in nature that awe us a little bit – momentarily, but only God is awesome enough to really fulfill that appetite.

Fearing and Desiring a Firm, Loving Father

So that is one example of the good kind of fear - the kind of fear that attracts. Huge, awesome things in the creation that get our hearts pumping and adrenalin flowing in fear, yet we will pay money

to experience them. But a better illustration is the father-child relationship as God designed it. I realize not everyone grew up with an ideal relationship with your dad, but some of you know what it is supposed to be like. You know what it is like to take your dad really, really seriously, so that just a look from across the room can send a chill down your spine, but at the same time you have no greater desire than to spend time alone with him. The worst words in the world are, “Just wait until your father gets home!” – and yet when he gets home, after the discipline is over, you have no greater desire than to be close to him again. Combined love and respect. Your dad is your best friend, but you would never dream of talking to him the way you talk to your buddies. You and your friend at school might call each other knucklehead or whatever, but no way would you ever call your dad that. Respect, seriousness, fear, and yet closeness, intimacy, and desire to be near him. After a hard spanking you cannot wait for that part where he says, “Did you learn your lesson?”

“Yes sir.”

“OK, I forgive you,” and he takes you in his arms and you know everything is OK between you *and that means the world to you.*

What if Your Father Was Bad?

Now, I know some of you hear that and it does not compute at all. Your dad was harsh, and you had zero desire to be close to him. Or you had no respect for him at all. Or maybe it was in the other direction – you and your dad were buddies, and nothing more. There was nothing to fear, nothing to be afraid of, you could call him a knucklehead and he would not think anything of it. Or maybe he was just indifferent – so busy he had no time for you, no interest in you, so you did not have any great longing to be near him because you barely knew him.

Raise your children so that fearing and desiring God makes sense to them

Let me say two things about the problem of bad fathers. First, it is a reminder of the massive responsibility we have as fathers. One of our most important responsibilities as fathers is to raise our children in such a way that when they grow up and read in God’s Word about fearing God and simultaneously desiring to draw near to Him, it makes sense to them.

Use unfulfilled longing to teach your heart about God

Secondly, if you did not have a father who raised you in a way to make that make sense, that makes it harder for you to understand, but it does not make it impossible for you to understand. I think all of us have a built in sense of the way a father is supposed to be. Isn’t it true that most people who grew up in one of the bad situations I described have an innate understanding that something was wrong? If your dad was overly harsh, don’t you have a built in understanding that that is not the way it is supposed to be? Or if you did not have a relationship where you desired to be near your dad – don’t you have some sense of understanding that it should not be that way? If you had a godly father you can use your relationship with him to assist you in understanding how we are to relate to God. But if you did not have a good father, use your unfulfilled longings to teach you how to interact with God as your Father.

Conclusion: Join the Elders and Living Creatures

And no matter what father you had, no father-child relationship is a perfect illustration of what it is like for us to approach God, because even if you love your dad, desire closeness with your dad, respect your dad, honor your dad, and fear your dad all at the same time – still, you do not worship your dad. God is our Father, first and foremost, but He is not only our Father. He is our King. And He is our Creator. And He is our Master and our God. And so we take our cues from those massive Cherubim and the mighty elders on the twenty-four thrones, and in our joy in the Lord we bend our

knees and bow to the ground in reverence and awe and we worship Him.

Benediction: Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."