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FLESH

SEX AND THE ACT OF WORSHIP

FLESH BY RICK JAMES- ARTICLE EXCERPT

AN UNBREAKABLE HABIT OF PURITY IN A PORNOGRAPHIC WORLD. Sexual immorality and pornography have become the defining issues and obstacles to spiritual growth and ministry on campus.

Flesh (for men) deals fearlessly with lust, sex and pornography in a clear, comprehensive manner and in a way that supports the Campus Ministry's spiritual Growth Model. Written in a straightforward, gracious and humorous style, Flesh does not stir up guilt but helps the reader to develop an unbreakable habit of purity.

Flesh is divided into three sections: small group discussion material, topical articles, and a month of daily devotionals.

Partial List of Topics Covered: Temptation, Confession, Community, Filling of the Spirit, Faith, Accountability, Pornography, Worship, Truth-Scripture, Habitual Sin, Homosexuality, Masturbation, and Sanctification-How We Grow.



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ALL WORSHIP

“Worship” is one of those words, like the word “holy,” that we kind of know but would be hard-pressed to define. The problem with words we can’t define is that their meaning can shift without us even noticing. Such is the case with “worship.” It has come to be synonymous with singing and praise music, which really only hints at its full meaning.

Worship, in a word, is “saturation.” Being saturated with the presence of God, we overflow back to God (in praise, service, thanksgiving, singing, etc.), and in turn, he refills us. Pouring ourselves into God and him pouring back into us—this cycle is worship. Our souls have been uniquely designed by God to carry on this function.

Because it’s a part of our design, everyone worships. Everyone lives to be saturated. Picture a sponge with all of those empty pockets and caverns. This is the anatomy of our soul, created for the wringing and absorbing of worship. But apart from God,

the life of a sponge is a painful one, because we are, in essence, hollow. Something else always fills the spaces. Like a fish flapping for oxygen on dry land, we are desperate for saturation. Therefore, everyone finds something to worship. The drunk saturates himself with alcohol. The greedy looks to money. The workaholic buries himself in activity. The worrisome gets saturated with anxiety, and the lustful, with lust.

Why do people fill themselves with these toxins? Because the only thing worse than being a sponge saturated with fear, worry, greed, activity, lust or alcohol is feeling like an empty sponge. No one can long endure the pain of feeling empty, so we all saturate ourselves with something. That which saturates oozes back out of us, making room for more of the same. Unfortunately, whatever we choose to consume and saturate ourselves with momentarily feels good, but if it’s not God, it becomes the very thing that kills our souls. It’s like drinking salt water.

When we become Christians, it’s not that we begin to worship, but we restore worship to its original design: the process of being saturated with God.

Worship is critical to our topic of lust and pornography because lust is a primary form of false worship (saturation). True worship is lust’s corrective.

For lack of definition, the full meaning or definition of worship has been sadly lacking because it is far more than singing. In fact, worship has little to do with singing. When the Bible speaks of worship, it has the following three categories in mind.

REPENTANCE AND HUMBLING

I’m generally non hygienic. My toenails are long. I shave once a week and seldom clean my hands after going to the bathroom unless there are sufficient people in the restroom to create shame. So, it will come as no surprise that a sponge is a sponge in my eyes. My wife, on the other hand,

was horrified when she saw me using the same sponge to clean the floor and then, in turn, wash our dishes. To make her point, she asked me to wring out the sponge in the sink. As I did, out came the most vile, putrid flow of black, bubonic plague fluid I've ever seen. Point made.

The first component of worship is this wringing out of our souls toward God. We drain the bile and create a vacuum to be filled with God's Spirit. We pour out our sin in humility and repentance. God fills us with his grace, mercy and love.

I think that most people understand how the first part of this cycle works. We have all at times confessed, repented and humbled ourselves before God. What is often missed is the way we are resaturated. Look at this passage:

Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"? But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

Psalm 10:14

Do you see that glorious "But ..."? That is the refill mechanism. "But you, O God, are good, are kind, act completely out of love ..." "But" is the great refrain of the Psalms. We vomit out our sin, the lies

we have believed, our self-centeredness, and we pivot on the word "but" before flooding our minds and souls with the truth about God—who he is and what he has done. Watch the dynamic as David humbles himself:

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8:4-9

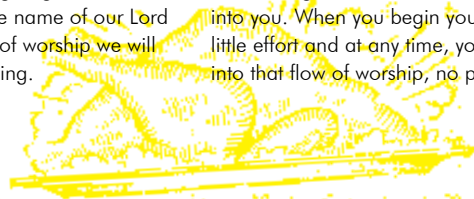
Do you see the emptying (squeezing out) and then, the drinking in of the phrase, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" This is the complete rinse cycle. This is worship—pouring yourself out to God and filling yourself with truth (God).

THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

Ephesians 5:19-20 says, "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The next aspect of worship we will look at is praise and thanksgiving.

Now, this works this way: You're feeling like a dry sponge, but, in faith, you squeeze out a few drops of thanksgiving toward God. You thank him for the things he's doing in your life. It's a little sandy, a little parched and dry ("Thanks, God, that you gave me feet so I can walk. Thanks that I have sideburns."), but you stay with it. All of sudden, you begin to notice your sponge starting to fill. There's more meaning in your words. The sphere of your thanksgiving begins to widen. The more you give thanks, through his empowerment and presence, the more thankful you become. You find yourself worshipping! At first, it's like priming a pump. But as you stay with it, the flow begins, first in spurt and then a continuous stream.

The same dynamic is true of praise. You begin in a rather boring way, "God, you are so sovereignly benevolently omnipotent." But then you say something a little different, like, "God, you're really smart." That's when your mind and soul begin to engage, "Yeah, you are smart, a genius in fact!" The pump starts flowing and you find yourself praising him for anything and everything. You are overflowing to him, and concurrently he's flowing into you. When you begin your day like this, with little effort and at any time, you can dive right back into that flow of worship, no priming needed.



Here's something else you'll find: when your heart is engaged in true worship, it's rather immune to the gods of false worship. Lust loses its gravitational field, or, as Elrond says of the hobbit Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, "The hobbit shows unusual resilience to its [the ring] evil." Empty sponges are drawn to any puddle. Saturated sponges are not.

SERVICE

Last, we pour ourselves out in service. Here, as we are saturated with God, we overflow into the porous lives of others. Look at the following verses:

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

Philippians 2:17

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of giving.

2 Corinthians 8:1

Do you see the language of saturation? Now, I want you to see two different dynamics of saturation: siphon and overflow. The siphon is when you step out into service completely empty, in faith, believing God will empower you. Let's take an unlovable person for example: You initiate in love toward Him without a flicker of compassion. But in so doing, you create a spiritual vacuum—a siphon—and you sense God's resources and presence flowing in behind to fill the void. Now, miraculously, you find yourself overflowing toward Him with a care and empathy that could only come from God.

The other dynamic of saturation is when we minister out of a heart overflowing with God's presence and joy. Your delight in him is so powerful that you cannot but help overflowing in service to others. Have you ever sat enjoying an amazing meal with a group of friends and not said, "Mmmmm, good!" or, "You've got to try this!" It's virtually impossible. The physics of joy suggest that joy is made complete by sharing it with others. It is this type of saturation that John speaks of in 1 John 1:3-4:

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

John is writing this epistle because he is so satiated with God that his joy is made complete by overflowing in service to others. This is the direction the cycle of worship goes in the realm of service. As we are filled with God, we overflow toward others, or we overflow toward others and God fills us.

SUMMARY

Our greatest hope for a life of purity is learning to worship: to overflow to God and he into us. No one can remain an empty sponge, no matter how much discipline they have. If you do not learn to saturate yourself with God, your soul will always return to the dirty waters of lust and pornography. If you find yourself inexorably drawn back, it is a warning that your soul is dry and in need of worship. Don't simply say "no" to those desires. Satisfy them in God.