

## How Holidays Can Help You to Worship

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Worship: Worship as a Lifestyle Series

Deuteronomy 16

I've been doing a series that I've called "Worship as a Lifestyle." And this morning, as part of that series, I want to introduce a little mini-series that will be all about different aids or helps that God gives us to assist us to worship him.

Patrick Kavanaugh, in his very nice little book on worship called *Worship a Way of Life* gives an illustration of helps to worship that I want to spin. Imagine that there is a single woman named Cindy, and her friend Lisa believes that she has found the perfect guy for Cindy. Single women, you can apply this to yourself. Imagine you are the single woman named Cindy and your friend, Lisa, believes she has found the perfect guy for you.

She says, "Cindy, Bill is absolutely perfect. He's mature. He's not flighty like you know who. He loves the outdoors just like you do. He's making tons of money at his law firm. He's not stuck on himself. He's a great listener. He is not a control freak. He doesn't smoke. He doesn't drink or use drugs. He's good looking. No prior marriages. He's not coming with a bunch of baggage. He's definitely heterosexual. And best of all, Cindy, he loves the Lord. In fact, I told Bill about you and he's very interested in meeting you. He said he left a message on your voice mail, but you never called him back."

Cindy responds and says, "Well, I don't know if I'm all that interested. I don't know about this, Lisa. How well do you really know this guy?" Cindy has been burned on blind dates before. She's not very enthusiastic. "Yes, I got the message on my voice mail. He sounded nice. He was pretty polite. But I don't know."

Lisa whines and wheedles and twists Cindy's arm and persuades. Finally, Cindy agrees to go out to lunch and meet Bill. Lisa introduces them and after having a small salad, she politely excuses herself saying, "Oh, look at this. I'm being paged at the office. Sorry, gotta run."

Cindy rolls her eyes. But the truth is she is having a great time with Bill. They really hit it off. He is a fantastic guy, and she is looking forward to spending a little time with him alone, maybe going out on another date.

Some of you single women are saying, "Now, where can I get Bill's phone number?" Unfortunately, this is just an illustration.

And in the illustration, Bill represents God. God calls us repeatedly. He's what one writer, Frances Thompson, called "the Hound of Heaven." He keeps searching us out and continues to seek us. The problem is we are not naturally enthusiastic about returning God's phone calls or meeting him. The Bible teaches that because of our sinful natures that we inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve, because of what the Bible calls our "fallen natures," "There are none of us righteous, not even one." There is no one who really understands and most importantly there is no one who seeks God (Romans 3:10-11).

So, we don't naturally come to God or worship God on our own. And in this series on worship, many of you might still be in the place you were when I began the series. You've learned a little bit about worship, but you don't find yourself worshipping any more than you did two months ago. The fact is we don't naturally, on our own, worship God. Our attention is diverted away from God by a million other things – our jobs, fixing up our homes, relational problems, financial problems, health issues, entertainment, hobbies, sin.

What we need is an introducer, a Lisa, a third party, something or someone who can assist us in getting connected with God. That's what I'm calling an aid to worship.

Haven't you seen this at work in your own life? You come to church on the weekend, and you are in the lobby and you're chatting with a friend. Or maybe you are new here, and you don't know anyone. You are just sort of looking around and at all the cards on the wall, the display racks. Your mind is a thousand light years away from God.

But then you come in to the auditorium and take your coat off. The music starts up and all around you people are singing. Pretty soon you find yourself joining in. And after a period of time, if you really join in, you find yourself more and more focusing your attention on the Lord. The music, the songs, the other people, they're all introducers; they are helping you; they are assisting you to meet with God in worship.

Throughout the Bible and throughout the history of the church, God uses various introducers. He uses these aids, these stimulators, and these helpers to worship. God knows we are not naturally enthusiastic about worship. We don't naturally return his phone calls, so he has these introducers. For example, he uses architecture - the architecture and design of the temple in the Old Testament, and in history, the architecture of soaring cathedrals, or church buildings with steeples that sweep us upward.

God uses music as an introducer. He uses the arts. He uses dance. He even uses foods; certain foods are associated with certain holidays in the Bible. For example, as we are going to find out today, matzoh, unleavened bread, is

associated with Passover. And certain breads are associated with Pentecost. And certain fruits are associated with the Feast of the Tabernacles.

Of course, one of the chief aids to worship in the New Testament and throughout church history has been the celebration of communion in the church. The bread and the cup that we share together remind us of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ for our sins. God is so willing to woo us into his presence; he so much wants your heart, that he literally uses all of our senses – sight, hearing, our sense of smell, our sense of taste, touch – to introduce us to himself.

Let me ask you a question: Have you discovered in your own life helpful aids to your worship? For a couple of months, I've been teaching on worship as a lifestyle, not just on Sunday mornings, but learning to practice the presence of God, to kneel before him and lift your hands even in times of trial, to satisfy your thirst not with a bunch of escapes, but with the Lord, to connect with God heart to heart, spirit to spirit. Are you enough in touch with yourself and the way you are wired to know what really helps you to worship? I believe that God has designed every one of us uniquely and wired us in a way that something, some bit of creation, helps our spirits to get in touch with God's Spirit.

What is it for you, friend? Have you discovered the value of listening to worship CDs? Just popping one in in the car; playing one in the kitchen; letting it direct your heart toward God? Maybe for you, playing your guitar assists you to worship, or taking a long walk; that's what I like to do. I just like taking long walks, especially a long walk in one of the parks around the city or on a bike trail where there's not a lot of people. Some of you might have designed or would think about designing a place in your house – maybe your study or a corner of your study or the corner of your bedroom – you design it as a place to meet with God. You might have a cross on the wall, or a wonderful Rembrandt print of Christ, or of the Prodigal returning. Maybe some of you are able to go into a church building in your neighborhood and kneel down at the altar and worship.

Do you know if you are in touch enough with yourself? Do you have enough hunger to worship to know what helps you, what assists you?

Today we are going to briefly look at how God uses the calendar, the flow of time, and particularly the holidays, to assist us to worship him. I've called today's talk, "How Holidays Can Help You to Worship." Let's pray.

Now, I want to go back to the analogy of the introducer that I used before. An aid to worship is just an introducer. It is not the worship itself. The worship happens when the two lovers, in my example, when Bill and Cindy connect by themselves. But because of our sinful natures, we always mess things up. We even mess up aids to worship, and we confuse them with the worship itself. Sometimes the introducer, the aid, never leaves. Remember in my analogy, Lisa introduced Cindy to Bill. But there comes a point in the lunch with the introducer excuses

herself. She said, “okay, I’ve done my job. You guys have met. You are hitting it off. You are connecting. It’s time for me to go. I’ll just quietly exit and you both enjoy each other’s company.”

But some introducers don’t get the hint. What if Lisa never goes? Suppose that, on every date, Cindy and Bill are in the movies, with Lisa sitting between them? Every dinner photo, Valentine’s Day – there’s Bill and Cindy, and there’s Lisa, with her face right between them. Who’s that? Why, it’s Lisa.

And that’s what it’s like when a person says, “You know, I can’t worship God unless I hear my favorite worship song, or my favorite CD.”

“I can’t worship God unless I’m in the favorite corner of my study where I have the cross, and my pillows are arranged a certain way, and I have two candles lit.”

“I can’t worship God if it is raining outside, and so I can’t take my favorite walk and hear the birds singing, hear the ducks quacking, or see the flowers blooming.”

Friends, the introduction, the aid, is not an end in itself. It is just a way to get you and God together. We looked at John 4, at that text that said, “God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” In our study we found out that worship is your spirit connecting with God’s spirit. And if you can’t worship unless you have exactly the right combination of ambiance and favorite music and lighting and birds, something is dreadfully wrong.

At some point, we need to dismiss the introducer. At some point we have to say, “Well, maybe my favorite aid is not available to me, but I can still connect spirit to spirit, the deepest part of my being with the deepest part of God’s being. I can still gaze upon the Lord.”

Are you like that? Do you always need your favorite aid? Or can you say, “No, I’ve grown to the point that, while I enjoy a certain kind of music, or a certain space, or certain things going on, nevertheless, I can go past that because I’ve already been introduced to the Lord, and I can draw into his presence without the aid.” That’s where you want to go, friend.

Occasionally, we have bad introducers. Imagine if Lisa in my analogy talked incessantly while Bill and Cindy were trying to get to know each other. Or what if she knocked a glass of wine off the table onto Cindy’s dress? Or at some point in the meal, she said to Bill, “Hey, Bill, are you going to eat all of that spaghetti sauce?”, and she reached over with a piece of bread and wiped up the plate? If Lisa makes a nuisance of herself, if she is a bad introducer, she could actually hinder Bill and Cindy from getting to know each other.

Now, let me apply this business of bad introductions to our church. There is a reason why we use a contemporary rock sound. Many of the people that we have historically drawn to the church are most familiar with contemporary rock. It's the kind of music they are familiar with. It is easy on their ears. When they think of music, they think of rock music.

But you know, I need to speak frankly to you right now as pastor here. And I say this with all affection, but our style is very, very white, and it's not hard to figure out why it is like that. It is because our worship leaders and most of the people on our teams are white folks. There's very little gospel sound to our music. Historically, there's been no rhythm and blues dimension. It's been all guitar driven. It's pretty white bread.

And that's okay for where we've been historically. But God has in the last few years repeatedly spoken to me and to us about increasing the racial diversity of this church. See, the Lord wants his church to be a model of reconciliation in the world. Everywhere you look in the world people are divided. 50% of all new marriages end in divorce. Kids are alienated from their parents. Parents don't even know what to say to their children, they are so relationally distant. Old and young people go in two separate directions. Singles don't hang out with marrieds. Men and women, Jew and Gentile, don't trust each other. The wealthy in the community drive past the poor on the highway and rush into our dated, suburban communities.

And certainly one of the major divisions in this country for its entire history has been between blacks and whites. There's been lots of hurt and lots of misunderstanding, lots of damage on both sides. The church is God's instrument to bring people together. God has designed the church to not only announce the reconciliation, the peace won for us at the cross, but God has designed the church to model reconciliation, to deliberately go out of our way to make peace, to bring people, who otherwise would be separate, together.

Let me speak affectionately to long time Caucasian Vineyard members. We are doing a less than great job of serving as introducers, at least for blacks, in our community. We have been a little bit, a little bit like Lisa knocking over glasses of wine onto people's laps. If we want to be great introducers to Jesus, to worship, then we have to increase the diversity of style of our worship music, or we will remain forever a church that is 90% white. And I will just say parenthetically that we have to move past 1985 if we want to serve as good introducers for the next generation of young adults.

Now, I'm speaking from my heart here. I know that you are probably like me, and you have a favorite style of worship, maybe even a favorite worship leader. What I am saying right now – I'm being pretty vulnerable up here, okay? But I, in no way, am suggesting that we change our values one iota. I am not interested in having a performance driven service. To me, the worship leaders are

introducers. I'm not interested in someone who is a worship leader being an incessant talker. Or in someone's self-expression as they go off into five or ten minutes of their hot little guitar lick. I'm interested in worship leaders who help you and me and new people connect with God heart to heart, spirit to spirit.

We value intimacy. We value connection with God. We value humility in our worship. We value servant hearts.

But can I ask you, who are long time members, to give the worship teams permission to become more diverse in our musical style? Let's try things out around here. Let's try some change. You long time members, you influencers, you can shut down anything other than the old familiar sound. You can complain. You can write angry emails. You can be negative in your groups, negative with anyone else, or you can say, "Yes, I know that I've connected with God historically here. And I want other people to connect. And I really do want to be a part of a church that is a major force in this community for bringing people together."

John Maxwell, a well-known Christian leader, a former pastor, has a picture of being an influencer that I've enjoyed for years. He said, "Long time members of a church need to be reminded that you always have two buckets in your hands. You carry a bucket of water and a bucket of gasoline, always two buckets. And when God wants to do something different and a little fire gets started, you, as an influencer, could take your bucket of water and douse the fire. Or you can take your bucket of gasoline and pour it on and say, 'Yes, this change promotes a higher value here than just my comfort level. Yes, this is a good thing. We're promoting the Kingdom.' Likewise, when you hear sparks of gossip, or negativity, you can pour the gasoline on those and spread it all around, or you can douse it with water."

Using your influence rightly means that you understand when to pour on the gasoline and when to pour on the water.

And affectionately, let me speak to people of color here. If you have worship gifts – you are a singer, you can play an instrument well, you are a member of this church, you have a servant's heart, and you really can work submissively under the leadership of our worship pastor, I'm going to ask you to call or email Michael Hansen, our worship pastor, and help us. You can meet with Michael and see about participating. Perhaps God would use you to help lead us toward change.

Hear me now, I'm not promising anyone a job. But I'm promising you an opportunity to interview for a job.

In the history of the church, there has always been a tendency to try to strip away all the aids, all the assistance to worship, and just get back to heart to heart communion with God. If we weren't fallen, if we were like Adam and Eve, we

wouldn't need any aids at all. In the garden there were no CDs. It was just Adam and Eve walking with God in the garden. They didn't even have clothes. They didn't need church vestments. They just enjoyed the presence of the Lord.

There has always been this Puritan tendency to try to strip away all the aids to worship. Forget church architecture. Let's just meet in the simplest, all bare, white room with white fluorescent bulbs – some place like Sam's Club. Forget the instruments. Let's just sing the songs acapella. Forget regular communion, we'll schedule it every quarter. We'll schedule it every year. Let's purify the church of all its rituals. Forget Christian holidays.

You know, the Puritans in the 17<sup>th</sup> century went so far as to pass laws forbidding December 25<sup>th</sup> to be celebrated festively. Instead, they turned December 25<sup>th</sup>, Christmas, into a fast day by law. Troops were deployed throughout London to look in people's windows to make sure that no Christmas dinners were being prepared.

As introducers, we have to stay on a tightrope. We heirs of the Puritans, and I'm an heir spiritually of the Puritans, we've so stripped worship down that there is very little left. We need some helps. We need more color in the room. We need to bring communion back in. I'm not talking about bringing in church vestments. I don't think I look good in robes. I'm not talking about bringing in candles and incense and all that stuff, but some elements.

One of the aids that God gives us is the calendar. And for us as evangelicals, we've lost the biblical sense of a rhythm in the year, a rhythm in our weeks. We've lost a sense of the sacredness of time. We just plod on day after day, week after week, trying to connect with God in our devotionals. God has given us helpers, he's given us assistants, and he's given us introducers to himself in our calendars. He's given us a way to break up time so that we can better orient our lives towards Him. Along with music, along with architecture, along with communion, God gives us the calendar.

Let me briefly share from Deuteronomy 16 about three Festivals that assisted people to worship God in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament there were six Festivals, or Feast Days prescribed. And there is one fast day called Yom Kippur. Of the six festivals, we read about three here listed in Deuteronomy 16: Passover, which was in the early Spring (late March, early April), which celebrated the Israelites' exodus from Egypt; Pentecost, which is also called the Feast of Weeks, celebrated in late Spring (late May, early June), which celebrated the end of the barley harvest; and the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths, what Jews call Sukkot, which is in the autumn (late September, early October), which celebrated the final harvest ingathering.

These three festivals were pilgrim festivals, and with every one of them God called the children of Israel to go up to Jerusalem. For example, in verse 5, "You

must not sacrifice the Passover in any town the Lord your God gives you except in the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name. There you must sacrifice the Passover in the evening.” God is calling his people to come to the Temple in Jerusalem and sacrifice the Passover lamb.

Likewise, in Pentecost, what’s called the Feast of Weeks, we read in verse 11:

And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name.

And concerning Tabernacles, verse 15:

For seven days celebrate the Feast to the Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose.

Three pilgrim festivals. Now, I believe that these three pilgrim festivals were designed by God as aids to assist people to worship the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Passover is an aid, a helper, to direct worship to Jesus, who is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, is an aid, a help, in directing our worship to God the Holy Spirit. Tabernacles, the Feast of Booths, is an aid, a help to assist us to direct our worship to God the Father.

I want to look at these holidays a little more closely. Passover directs our attention to God the Son, to Jesus. We read in verse 2:

Sacrifice as the Passover to the Lord your God an animal from your flock or herd at the place the Lord will choose as a dwelling for his Name.

We’re given further instructions about the animal that was to be sacrificed in Exodus 12:5 where we read:

The animal you choose must be a year old male without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.

A year old male without defect. In other words, the lamb that is to be slaughtered on the Passover is to be a young male that is perfect. And through the principle of typology, this business of seeing correspondence between the stories of the Old Testament and the New Testament, we read in the New Testament that Jesus was often called “The Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb.” This Messiah sent into the world by God was without any defects, without any sin. His follower, Peter, said that he was like a lamb without any spot or blemish.

See, in fulfillment of this type (or Old Testament picture of the Passover Lamb), Jesus lived a sinless life. Have you ever meditated on that, the sinlessness of Jesus? Here was a man who always had pure motives for everything he did. He



never manipulated anyone. He never had a hidden agenda. He never had a selfish reason for saying or doing what he was doing. He operated his whole life from absolutely pure motives. His sinlessness means that he always loved God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, with all of his strength. There never was a time in Jesus' life when he didn't put God first. His sinlessness means that he always loved people as much as he loved himself. He never put himself ahead of people. Jesus never gossiped, not even once. He never whispered some little negative thing about one of the disciples to one of the other disciples. He never said to John, "Well, what do you think of what Peter said back there? Didn't that hurt your feelings?" He never told a lie. He never exaggerated. He never was arrogant. He never put anyone who was weak or hurting down. He never belittled anyone. He never treated the least in the society – women, the poor, the handicapped, the sick – he never treated the least in the society as if they were least in his eyes. Everyone who met Jesus felt incredibly important. He wasn't looking over people's shoulders when he talked with them to find somebody more interesting to talk to, more powerful. He never held a grudge.

We're also told in Exodus 12 that the people were to take some of the blood of this sacrificed perfect lamb and put it on the tops and sides of the doorframes of the houses where they ate the lamb. And in verse 12 of Ex. 12 we read further:

That on the same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first born, both men and animals. And I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are and when I see the blood I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

Now the only difference, and this is really an important point, the only difference between those who lost their firstborn that night and those who didn't, the only difference between those houses that were visited by the angel of death and those that the angel of death passed over was that one house was marked with the blood of the lamb on its door posts and the other house had no blood on it. God didn't draw distinction between one house being the house of a Jew and the other being a house of an Egyptian. Jewish homes without blood would have received the visit of the angel of death.

And this is a principle that runs through the scriptures. A person is saved from the judgment of God when God sees the blood of the lamb over your life. When God sees the blood of Messiah Jesus, the Lamb of God, applied to your life by faith, then you are saved. Then you are safe, secure and protected from judgment. When He looks at your life, He is looking to see the mark of the blood on your life.

It says in verse 7 that they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lamb. Notice what

is not on the doorposts. God doesn't say, "I want you to pin to the door post of your house a genealogical record of your ancestors. Tell me about your family's heritage."

When I start talking with people about matters of faith, and how it is that they believe themselves to be right with God, I can't tell you how many people will tell me about their heritage: their praying mother, or their grandpa who was a pastor, or how religious or orthodox someone was in their background. God doesn't ask, "Put on the door post of your house your genealogy." He doesn't say, "Well, what I want you to put on the door post of your house, what I am looking for is a record of your church or Synagogue attendance." "I haven't missed mass in 25 years." He doesn't say, "What will distinguish you is your church attendance. That's what I am looking for."

He doesn't say, "What I want on the door post of your house is your 1040 Tax Form. I will pass over you in judgment because of your income, because of the size of your housing deduction. I am quite impressed by your housing deduction and how much you gave last year." Nailing your tax form to the doorpost of your house won't save you.

And neither will your degrees, diplomas, professional training, your SAT scores, or the written testimonies of your friends and relatives save you. God doesn't say, "What I want you to do is to start collecting from everyone who knows, you their testimony about the quality of your life."

"Well, she is such a good mother. She always gave herself. She worked herself to the bone." That is not what will protect you from the judgment of God – your children saying that you were a good mother or a good father, so self-sacrificing, so nurturing. Not even the written testimony of your own conscience will God ask to have nailed to the doorpost of your house. It doesn't matter how you evaluate yourself – whether you think you are a pretty decent person; whether you feel like you always try your best to be good or you don't try at all.

The only issue in terms of the judgment of God is is your life protected by the blood of Jesus or not. Have you put your trust totally in Jesus' shed blood and his shed blood alone to save you? Nothing else goes up on the doorpost of your house other than the blood of the Lamb. Nothing. Not the blood plus something.

Now, you'll note in Deuteronomy 16 that there are two holidays being referred to in this discussion of the Passover. First of all, God says: "Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover of the Lord your God, because in the month of Abib he brought you out of Egypt by night." And then in verse 3 God tells the people, "Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste—so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt."

They are to celebrate the Feast of the Passover and immediately following the Passover when they slaughter the Passover lamb, they are to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Now, I believe that this Passover, these two holidays – Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread - are meant for us to be a picture of the Christian life. Passover is a picture of what Christ has done for us in freeing us from the guilt of our sins. And the Feast of the Unleavened Bread is a picture of what Messiah does in us in freeing us from the practice of sin. Passover is a picture of justification, a one-time action that requires the slaughter of a lamb. But the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a picture of sanctification, an ongoing activity that lasts for seven days – the whole life is cleansed from sin.

One of the great problems of people trying to have a relationship with Jesus is that they don't understand the relationship between Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. Some people try to separate these two holidays that are meant to be inextricably intertwined.

They say, "I want Passover. I like the idea of having blood over my life and escaping God's judgment. I am just not that interested in keeping the Festival of Unleavened Bread and getting rid of the old leaven of my sins. I want to be saved. I consider myself to be saved. But I am going to hold onto the old leaven of sexual sin or my food addictions or my addictions to this other person and my dependencies."

"I love the Passover, and I want to be saved by the Lamb, but I refuse to move out of the home where I am living with my boyfriend/girlfriend. I want a relationship with Jesus, but I am also going to hold onto the leaven of my own independence from God. And in this or that area of my life, I really don't care what God thinks or what the Bible says. I want the Passover, but I refuse to cleanse my heart of the leaven of bitterness and unforgiveness that has resulted from what my dad did or what my mom did. Or what my spouse or ex spouse did. I won't cleanse my heart from the leaven of hurt and anger."

"I am just not going to live in an unhappy marriage, no matter what God and the Bible say about divorce."

Do you understand that you can't celebrate the Passover without celebrating the Festival of Unleavened Bread? You can't ask God to save you from the judgment of sin if you are also not willing to be cleansed from the leaven of sin in your life. People are always trying to divide what cannot be divided.

Or people get the cart before the horse. We have to get these Festivals in the proper order. We begin with the Passover, with the slaughter of the Lamb. You don't begin with the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Passover is the foundation.

Faith in the death of Messiah, the Lamb of God and the application of his blood, that's the beginning of the Christian life. And the follow-through, the rest of the life, is the cleansing of your life from the leaven of sin.

So many people put the cart before the horse. They want to cleanse themselves from the leaven of sin, without first slaughtering the Passover Lamb and applying the blood to their lives. I can't tell you how many people I talk with who say, "Rich, I don't think I am ready to become a follower of Jesus because I really haven't cleaned up my life yet. I have to get cleaned up. I have to get straightened out. I have to work out some issues with my boyfriend/girlfriend, my spouse or ex spouse, my drinking, or my work situation. I have to clean myself up and get rid of some of the leaven, and then I will be ready to trust in the blood of the Lamb as that which saves me from the judgment of God."

Let me briefly speak to you about the Feast of Weeks. According to Deuteronomy 16:9, the people were to: "Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain." The starting point, we read in another place, was the Sunday that follows Passover. So you have Passover, then you go to the Sunday after Passover, which is the holiday in the Old Testament called First Fruits and in the New Testament called Easter and you count off seven weeks, or fifty days using the Jewish method of counting where you count the day you start with. And fifty days after the Sunday after Passover is the Feast of Weeks. Pentecost is the Feast of Weeks. "Pentecostos" means "fiftieth." This feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, was a harvest festival in which the first fruits of the grain were presented to the Lord.

It is interesting that in Acts 2 on Pentecost, God gives believers the first fruits of their inheritance by giving us the Holy Spirit. Pentecost was not only celebrated as a First Fruits Festival, but Jews always celebrated the holiday as a day in which God instituted his covenants with man. Jews have historically believed that God gave Moses the Old Testament law on the day of Pentecost. And it is interesting that just as God wrote those laws on tablets of stone on the Day of Pentecost, so in Acts 2 God writes his law on our hearts by his Holy Spirit.

In some parts of the world, Jews celebrate Pentecost by pouring out pitchers of water over their heads. See, this is an aid, an assistant, and a help to get people to worship God the Spirit.

And then we have the Feast of Tabernacles where we read in verse 13: "Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your wine press." It is the final harvest feast where Jews celebrate the final ingathering into their barns from their vineyards and their crops. And I believe this is a Festival designed to point us to God, the Father. See, the Feast of Tabernacles reminded people annually about how God dwelt with them in a tent in the desert, and it points forward, according to

Zechariah 14, to that final day at the end when God will once again make his dwelling with men and women on the earth.

But it ultimately points not only to the time when God will be our God and we will be his people, but Tabernacles also points to the final great harvest when Jesus, having gathered from the earth all those who are his, turns to the Father according to 1 Corinthians 15 and hands over the kingdom, and the authority, and the rule, and all the true worshippers of God. The final harvest is brought in and presented to God the Father as Christ's offering to the Father.

Now briefly these three Festivals have a few things in common that are instructive for us as Christians as we wish to direct our attention to the Triune God. First of all, these three festivals required people to break from their routines three times a year as I mentioned before. We read in verse 16:

All your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

These three festivals to each member of the Trinity required people to break from their routines. People actually had to change their location and travel to Jerusalem. In the Feast of Tabernacles, what Jews call Sukkot, people actually camped out in booths made from tree branches for a period of seven days.

Let me ask you a question: Do you have in your life any scheduled breaks from your routine, other than your annual vacation? Do you have a regularly scheduled weekly or monthly break to refresh your soul, to refuel, to reconnect with God? I don't mean a break to fill yourself with entertainment. But you see, you and I need in our lives a block of time, some space, that's planned out and scheduled in, that's in your Day Timer to connect you again with God.

I'll tell you what I and all the pastors on our staff do. Every pastor on staff is required to have a monthly day of prayer, to get away from the office, to go somewhere to a retreat center, to a quiet house, to a park, and spend a day a month just alone with God in prayer and worship.

Friend, could you schedule for yourself a break from the routine?

Mothers of small children, if you have a husband, could you ask your husband, "Not just so I can go out and spend time with my friends, but so I can take a few hours to be with God, will you watch the kids or get a babysitter?" Just schedule half of a Saturday or Sunday once a month to be with God.

One of the things we are going to do this year between Palm Sunday and Easter is to have some Holy Week activities to bring about a break in your routine. We are going to schedule some time for the entire church to get together for prayer.

We are going to schedule Good Friday as a Fast Day. Some of you may want to take Good Friday off. We are going to have Good Friday services here. We would like to prepare ourselves for Easter Sunday, to break the routine.

The second thing you see in all of these festivals is a focus upon the poor and the alien, the person who is not a Jew, but is a Gentile, outside the covenant community. Verse 11, we read:

Rejoice in the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you.” Verse 14 the same: “Be joyful at your feast you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites, the aliens, and the fatherless, the widows that live in your towns.

The people of Israel were called upon to focus attention on the poor, the widow, and the outsider. Three times a year, they were called to give a special offering. Verse 10:

Celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the Lord your God has given you.

Verse 16:

No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed: each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.

For Palm Sunday, which is March 24<sup>th</sup>, mark your calendars. We’re going to take up a special offering. Beyond your normal gift, your tithe, I’m going to ask each one of you, if you are part of this church, to bring a an additional sum of money for the poor, for the extension of the gospel through world missions, for ministry to the homeless, for poor kids in the neighborhood to expand our afterschool program. We would like to give at least \$100,000 of our Palm Sunday offering away to missions and to the poor. The reason I am announcing it now is to give you a month to prepare. Beyond your tithe, get ready for a special offering on March 24<sup>th</sup>.

The final thing we see in all of the holidays is a note of joy, along with the solemnity of the festivals. We read in verse 11:

And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place he will choose.

Verse 14:

Be joyful at your feasts.

See, this is a picture of worship, the joyful connection of the people of God with God. You know, in the Bible the word “joy” is used over 400 times – 80 times in the Psalms, nearly 40 times in the gospels. Friend, you can tell whether you are connecting with God in worship, making proper use of his helps, because there will be in your life a note of unquenchable joy.

As the psalmist says in Psalm 16:11:

You have made known to me the path of life, you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Whatever you are going through, however much God has, at this moment, designed for you—trial, difficulty – as you worship God your life will be characterized by you sharing the joy of eternity. Let's pray.

## **How Holidays Can Help You to Worship**

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Rich Nathan

February 23-24, 2002

Worship: Worship as a Lifestyle Series

Deuteronomy 16

### **I. Introductions**

- A. The Need for Introducers
- B. The Overbearing Introducer
- C. The Bad Introducer
- D. The Non-Existent Introducer

### **II. Holidays as Introductions (Deuteronomy 16:1-17)**

- A. The Feast of Passover: An Introduction to God the Son (Deuteronomy. 16:1-8)
  - 1. The Perfect Lamb (Exodus 12:5)
  - 2. The Blood Applied (Exodus 12:7, 12)
- B. The Feast of Weeks: An Introduction to God the Holy Spirit (Deuteronomy 16:9-12)
- C. The Feast of Tabernacles: An Introduction to God the Father (Deuteronomy 16:13-17)

### **III. Elements of the Introduction**

- A. A Break From the Routine (Deuteronomy 16:16)
- B. A Focus Upon the Poor (Deuteronomy 16:10, 11, 14, 16, 17)
- C. An Experience of Joy (Deuteronomy 16:11, 14)