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*The piercing, melancholy screech
echoes through the valleys and hills. The
worker raises his gaze to discover the eagle gliding on the invis-
ible pathways of the sky. Riding the warmer currents and updrafts from its
lofty sweep, the bird scans the ground for movement of prey. Effortlessly the eagle
coasts across the skies, large wings outstretched, broad tail flared. She is freedom, a life
freed from the constraints of gravity. She floats and soars through space, wheels high over
the trees... And the worker is envious, regretting that he, too, cannot know such exhilarating
freedom.*

SOARING

WITH WINGS LIKE EAGLES

A number of years ago, in another place and time, I wrote and performed the narration for a new worship musical. The local church for which this musical was written did not have the traditions for enthusiastic, demonstrative worship, so there was really nothing in the production that might have been called “charismatic.” This church body was conservative, even restrained in its worship, with a large contingent of venerables, and it was not my purpose to offend, but to encourage all of us into a closer, more authentic worship experience of our God.

A Time of Praise

In spite of the human factor, the Holy Spirit was indeed present. Before the musical (which was performed during a Sunday morning service), the Music Minister, Deacon Chairman (who was also the sound man for the production) and I met for prayer. Those few closeted moments in themselves became a time of anointed worship as we bared our souls and intentions before the Lord, and placed all of our talents and gifts upon His altar. Through the ministry of the Spirit, it was a time of exquisite, bone-racking communion with God.

The musical went well. Those who participated—both in the choir and in the pews—experienced a genuine time of worship and praise. While the worship was understated, leaning more toward instruction than dancing in the aisles, there were still a few moments in which the Spirit prodded some of us toward such things as spontaneous praise and the reverent lifting of hands.

As the worship leader, however, I was in a good position to observe those in the congregation, and I was disappointed—but not surprised—to see some discomfort, even

disgust, on the faces of a few. And so I also was not surprised by a conversation I had a few days later with one of the church members—a leader not only in that local body, but in the regional association as well. This conversation, while cordial at both ends, became for me a benchmark illustration for those who are remarkably fearful of soaring too close to God.

“Quit dragging us up to God”

Over the course of a ninety-minute telephone conversation this gentleman explained to me that this was just not how we were to do things here. At great length he pointed out that not only was he, personally, not interested in worshipping in such a manner, but that neither were *we* to do it. To him, the practice of a more demonstrative worship, such as the raising of hands in praise—indeed, even the concept of “worship” itself—was just a fad, just a gimmick. His contention was that believers in his denomination worshipped by *fellowshipping* with each other. Churches that were worship-oriented, he said, traditionally died out, whereas churches that were fellowship-oriented grow in number. We should not be demonstrative in a worship service; it’s just



“not necessary, and not a [his denomination] thing.”

This brother in Christ finished the conversation by making what I found to be a rather astounding statement. I was left dumbfounded when this church leader said, “People like you are on a higher spiritual plane, and we want you to quit dragging us up to God.”

An Intimacy with God

That eye-opening conversation so long ago formed in me a renewed determination to *never* deny the powerful Spirit living within me, to never deny the yearning I have to live every day of my life closer to God than the day before.

To be fair, my friend was correct about one thing: No one should be “dragging” anyone else up to God. That is the work of the Spirit. Every believer in Christ is equipped with the same connections to God, and it is never another person’s responsibility to drag anyone else kicking and screaming toward the throne. We are a body of equal saints before the Lord, and there will always be some uncomfortable in His presence.

My Christian brother failed to understand, however, one important point about worship. What he interpreted as worship that was *self*-glorifying, was in reality a personal determination to connect more intimately with God. We raise

our hands in prayer, worship, or praise in an effort to be closer to Him, in an effort to raise our love up to Him—which is precisely what worship is all about! Just as an adoring child lifts her arms up to her daddy when he steps in the door, we lift up our hands, crying, “Abba, Father, I love You!”

Rising into the Holiness

The mechanics of worship—whether exuberant or restrained—and daily living are not nearly so important as the question of whether or not we choose to rise into the holiness of God. If we love this earth, we are probably not loving God sufficiently.

Though youths grow weary and tired,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,
Yet those who wait for the Lord
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.
(Isaiah 40:30-31)

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”
(Matthew 6:24 nkjv)

There is something more than a little scary about a child of God not wishing to be closer to his Parent. When we receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of personal redemption, we also receive a direct, almost umbilical-like link to the Father.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.
(Romans 8:15-16)

What has happened in our own spirit when that connection has become frayed? What has happened to our system of priorities when the things of this earth take precedence over the things of God? What has happened to our spirit when we no longer desire to live above the pedestrian pathways of this world, in the exhilarating, ethereal presence of God?

Allured into the desert,
With God alone, apart,
There spirit meeteth spirit,
There speaketh heart to heart.
Far, far on that untrodden shore,
God’s secret place I find;
Alone I pass the golden door,
The dearest left behind.

There God and I—none other;
Oh far from men to be!
Nay, midst the crowd and tumult,
Still, Lord, alone with Thee.
Still folded close upon Thy breast,
In field, and mart, and street,
Untroubled in that perfect rest,
That isolation sweet.

O God, Thou art far other
Than men have dreamed and taught,
Unspoken in all language,
Unpictured in all thought.
Thou God art God—He only learns
What that great Name must be,
Whose raptured heart within him burns,
Because he walks with Thee.

Stilled by that wondrous Presence,
That tenderest embrace,
The years of longing over,
Do we behold Thy Face;
We seek no more than Thou hast given,
We ask no vision fair,
Thy precious Blood has opened Heaven,
And we have found Thee there.

O weary souls, draw near Him;
To you I can but bring
One drop of that great ocean,
One blossom of that spring;
Sealed with His kiss, my lips are dumb,
My soul with awe is still;
Let him that is athirst but come,
And freely drink his fill.
(Gerhard Tersteegen)