

Churches the world over are filled with people who don't feel like being there—people who do not *feel* like worshipping God. To some this is hypocrisy—to others, simply the way of things.



## IN PRAISE OF THE HYMN

### The Quickening Spirit

In fact, Eugene Peterson claims that the act of worship rightly comes *before* the feeling:

Feelings are great liars. If Christians only worshiped when they felt like it, there would be precious little worship that went on. Feelings are important in many areas, but completely unreliable in matters of faith. We think that if we don't feel something there can be no authenticity in doing it. But the wisdom of God says something different, namely, that we can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting. Worship is an act which develops feelings for God, not a feeling for God which is expressed in an act of worship. When we obey the command to praise God in worship, our deep, essential need to be in relationship with God is nurtured.

So it is possible for us to approach God—whether in corporate or private worship—in a disinterested, apathetic condition. Or we may approach Him with good intent, but lacking the words to express what is in our heart.

The Bible tells us that it is one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit to supply those words.

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

*Romans 8:26-27*

The Spirit may feed us the words to use, or He may simply translate our groanings into the language of heaven. In either case, when we approach the throne with lethargic motives, it is good to call upon the Holy Spirit to assist us in expressing the honest intent of our heart.

When the mind is blank to everything but its fundamental need for God, just as Scripture gives us words we can pray to the Father, our hymnal can supply words with which we can call upon the Spirit to quicken our heart toward heaven. And there are a number of hymns we can use for this purpose.

"Breathe on Me, Breath of God"

"O Breath of Life"

"Come, Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove"

"Fill Me Now"

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The Christian acquires the Spirit at the moment of conversion. He need not repeatedly request Him to enter, or to draw closer, for He is already a part of him.

But the Christian, though carrying heaven's passport, is a pilgrim in an unholy land, where he can become insulated from the touch of the Spirit. And this is the condition addressed in the hymn written by George Croly, an Irish minister, serving in the London of the early 1800s.

*Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;  
Wean it from earth,  
through all its pulses move;  
Stoop to my weakness,  
mighty as Thou art,  
And make me love Thee as I ought to love.*

The world can quickly wrap us up in its dingy woolen blanket, shielding us from the light and life from above—even from the effective touch of someone already a part of us. When this happens, we require no fireworks, no profound angelic visitations—we simply need to know He is still there.

*I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies,  
No sudden rending of the veil of clay,  
No angel visitant, no opening skies;  
But take the dimness of my soul away.*

The presence of the Spirit means we are imbued with a hunger for the things of God.

*Hast Thou not bid us love Thee,  
God and King?  
All, all Thine own, soul,  
heart and strength and mind.  
I see Thy cross—there teach my heart to cling:  
O let me seek Thee, and O let me find.*

But the flesh cannot possibly sustain this hunger on its own. God is not only the destination. He is the path. He is the one who teaches us the way to Himself.

*Teach me to feel that Thou art always nigh;  
Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear,  
To check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;  
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer.*

As the Spirit does His work, as the groanings are translated into intelligible communion, the presence of our God becomes

more real, and the heart crescendos upward, reaching, claspings, drawing life energy from the Lord.



*Teach me to love Thee as Thine angels love,  
One holy passion filling all my frame;  
The baptism of the heaven-descended Dove,  
My heart an altar, and Thy love the flame.*

George Croly

## OFFERING

Our relationship with God is—as in any human relationship—two-sided. It consists of giving and taking, sharing and receiving. In a healthy relationship, there is action and reaction; when one person does something, the other life is affected.

Honesty, too, is part of any healthy relationship. So when we sing to God to reinvigorate us by His Spirit, we should mean it—and anticipate His reply. Time spent with God should result in a change, not necessarily dramatic, but at least real.

When we approach the throne to declare the supernatural reality of our God, and when we call upon Him to clear away the built-up layers of this “veil of clay,” we should expect something to happen in our own life as a result. And very often the result is an offering—and sometimes an offering of our very life.

*Take my life, and let it be consecrated,  
Lord to Thee;*

*Take my moments and my days—  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

As you sing this offering to God, sing it thoughtfully and honestly. Notice that the first stanza, and the end of the last, are an all-inclusive summary: Take my life. *All* of it. The stanzas between then itemize the components of our life: stanzas two and three deal with our physical bodies, while stanzas four through six deal with our possessions and our spirit. When

we come before the throne in worship, we should not withhold any part of ourself from our God.

*Take my hands and let them move  
at the impulse of Thy love;  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee,  
Swift and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my voice and let me sing always,  
only, for my King;*

*Take my lips and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee,  
Filled with messages from Thee.*

*Take my silver and my gold—  
not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect and use  
Ev'ry pow'r as Thou shalt choose,  
Ev'ry pow'r as Thou shalt choose.*

*Take my will and make it Thine—  
it shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart—it is Thine own,  
It shall be Thy royal throne,  
It shall be Thy royal throne.*

*Take my love—my Lord, I pour  
at Thy feet its treasure store;  
Take myself—and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee,  
Ever, only, all for Thee.*

Frances Ridley Havergal

Next Week: *Constant Mercies*



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