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Desiring Jesus



Ellen White
and worship

In his recent book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith states that “our ultimate love is what we *worship*. . . . It’s what I desire, what I love, that animates my passion.”¹ Worship is more than following a traditional or contemporary liturgy. Worship is longing for, loving, and desiring God.

Some think “desire” is a prophetic name for Christ as the coming Messiah. “‘And I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:7). This prophecy not only speaks about the Christ who was to come, but also the longing of all people of the earth. For ages, humanity has desired Him. As the psalmist wrote: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God” (Ps. 42:1).

Ellen White intimately understood this when she wrote *The Desire of Ages*. For decades she longed to write a comprehensive work on the life of Christ. In the 1890s she was afforded the opportunity while living in Australia. Her “desire of ages” sprang from her devotional life, in which she experienced profound worship in the presence of one she came to understand as a loving friend. When she started writing in 1892, she quoted the hymn “Jesus, Lover of My Soul”² in her diary.

When she concluded the book in 1898, she again quoted a hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”³ For Ellen White, desiring Jesus was the only reasonable response to the love of God in Christ. Nothing satisfied her like being with Jesus. “My whole being longs after the Lord. I am not content to be satisfied with occasional flashes of light. I must have more.”⁴

In the preface the publishers of *The Desire of Ages* state, “It is God’s design that this longing of the human heart should lead to the one who alone is able to satisfy it. The

desire is of Him that it may lead to Him, the fullness and fulfillment of that desire. That fullness is found in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Eternal God.”⁵

When reading *The Desire of Ages*, we often think the book presents a historical view of Jesus. The purpose goes much deeper, however, seeking to cultivate in the heart of the reader the attitude of worship. It asks, *What is your heart's desire? What or whom do you worship?*

THE WORSHIP PERSPECTIVE

I suggest that the church reconsider the entirety of Ellen White's writings, particularly the Conflict of the Ages Series, as a treatise on worship. The great controversy between Christ and Satan centers on the critical issue of love for God or love of self. Desiring God is the only reasonable response to His loving-kindness for us (Rom. 12:1, 2). Keen readers of the Conflict of the Ages Series have been quick to note the poetic first and last sentences of the entire work: “God is love.”

The first book, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, begins with these words; the fifth book, *The Great Controversy*, concludes with a most profound, doxological passage: “From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”⁶ White frames and centers the narrative on worship.

Two paragraphs earlier she wrote:

“And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His char-

acter. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.”⁷

How does Ellen White incorporate this worship perspective into her third volume of the series—*The Desire of Ages*? Like a chiasm, the heart of the work is the most important, centering on desiring Jesus. She begins the book by declaring Jesus as the “Immanuel,” God with us, the image of God, the outshining of His glory. “It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world.”⁸ What is this glory? This is His glory: the light of His love, His radiant character.⁹

JESUS' MISSION

Jesus came to praise the Father by revealing His benevolent character. He prayed for His disciples: “I have declared unto them Thy name”—“merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth”—“that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”¹⁰

Most important, Ellen White states the purpose of Christ's mission was for worship. “*Jesus had come to teach the meaning of the worship of God.*”¹¹ Every miracle, every conflict, every act of mercy, was to reveal the glory of God, to inspire the desire and affection of human hearts toward God in worship.

I invite the global church to reconsider reading Ellen White through her own lens—Christ's purpose on earth was to reveal God's love so we would, in turn,

Christ's purpose on earth was to reveal God's love so we would, in turn, love and desire Him.

love and desire Him. This is genuine worship. Furthermore, because our resurrected Lord lives, He gives us His Holy Spirit to enable and enliven our worship. He liberates our wills and quickens our affections. He draws us into His presence, stirring up in us a desire for Him.

Jesus has ever been the Desire of Ages. He asks you today, Will you desire Him over all else? Will you worship Him? ☉

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 51. See also James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

² *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), no. 489.

³ *Ibid.*, no. 499.

⁴ Ellen G. White manuscript 20, 1892.

⁵ *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940).

⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 678.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 84.

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