

Series: Vision Month 2022

Title: Having a Daily Devotional Time

Text: Psalm 86:9; John 4:23

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As beings made in the image of God, we are made to worship. The Westminster Catechism rightfully said, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.” Such a statement was based on truth found in Psalm 86:9 — “All the nations you have made will come and bow down before you, Lord, and will honor your name.” We will never fully live up to the Lord’s intent for our lives until we learn what it means to personally worship the Lord.

Jesus Himself spoke of these realities. He once had an encounter with a woman who would have been considered an undesirable by those within the religious establishment of the day. Because of cultural norms and stereotypes, she felt unworthy of the Lord. Jesus told her, “...an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him” (John 4:23). Many are like the woman Jesus met. They feel unworthy or unable to worship. Whatever your station and situation in life, know that the Heavenly Father desires praise from you.

In this message, I will talk about how one can cultivate a personal, daily devotional time. To do so, I will speak under three subject headings. First, I will talk about how the Lord has created us for worship. Second, I will talk about the elements involved in personal worship. Finally, I will give advice on how to implement a daily devotional time.

1. We are made for worship.

I once heard worship defined as “giving worth to God.” Seen in this way, the act involves much more than simply singing songs. It is a posture of the soul wherein one regards the Lord appropriately. It is a disposition by which one places God first in his or her affections. Yes, worship can be done through singing songs, but it can also be done through how one works, how one lives, and how one relates to others. It is often seen in personal times of retreat to read God’s Word and devote one’s self to prayer. Perhaps the most well-known form of worship is the corporate gathering of the church for preaching and praise.

A proper understanding of worship is grounded in the belief that humanity is made for the activity. Life is rather meaningless until we grasp our reason for existing. We are alive to know and praise God. Worship is much more robust and far-reaching than most imagine. In all that we do, we are to aim to give worth to God. When we study Scripture, we see several Biblical truths that underscore this reality.

The Image of God. In Genesis 1:26-27, we are told that God made the first man and woman in His “image.” Moses’ account of creation was intentional to show the distinctiveness of humanity in comparison to the animal kingdom. While God made other beings by His spoken Word, he cultivated and crafted man by using other pre-created matter. He then personally breathed life into the man (Genesis 2:7). The Lord’s handiwork revealed that Adam was different than the fish in the sea, the birds in the

sky, and the animals on the land. Adam's distinctiveness was based on the fact that he was made for a relationship with God. Each man, woman, boy, and girl who has ever lived descended from the first man and woman. Everyone has been made to worship!

The Law of God. In giving His Moral Law, the Lord said, "Do not have other gods besides me" (Exodus 20:3). The Lord knew that humanity would constantly value other things above Him, so He explicitly instructed His creation to keep Him first. When idols of materialism, ego, and sensual enjoyment become the end goal of our lives, the Lord is robbed of glory. The worship and praise He deserves is diverted to inferior things. God's Law reveals that life works best when men and women retain a heart devotion to the Lord. It implies that we are made to worship the Lord. Those who neglect worship not only deny their reason for existing, they also violate God's Moral Law.

The Great Commandment. Jesus was once asked which of God's commandments was the most important. He replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). The love of which Jesus spoke was not an empty, sentimental emotion. Instead, it involved an intentional turning of one's affections to the Lord. Such is the essence of worship — setting one's soul on God. Jesus' commandment revealed that the heart of the matter in religion is really a matter of the heart. It implied that we best please the Lord when we have a worshipful regard for Him, His ways, and His Word. Worship should be a top priority in our lives!

The Eternal State. If one is tempted to believe that worship isn't important, one should consider what the Bible teaches about the hereafter. The New Earth is depicted as being a place of endless praise. In the book of Revelation John, described the eternal state of God's children by saying, "And there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:3-4). If worship is our eternal destiny, shouldn't we make it a priority in this temporal life? May we be people who prioritize both personal and corporate praise. In regularly worshipping, we fulfill our purpose in existing, we honor God's Law, we obey Christ's Great Commandment, and we prepare ourselves for Heaven!

2. Worship involves certain indispensable activities.

In our busy world, worship is something that is often neglected. Most regard it as a thing they should do, but they rarely find time for it. When they do commit themselves to it, they have a hard time settling down and stilling themselves. Like many other activities, worship is usually a bit rushed. As a result, most never experience any real benefit from it. In the end, most give up. Since they don't see any point in worshipping, they stay busy with other activities.

Sadly, some professing believers spend their entire lives without ever truly connecting with God in worship. They opt for a spectator-based religion, choosing to simply watch others perform in worship. Others adopt a performance-based approach, cultivating a religious life that is based on work and service that is empty of heart devotion to God. How can we slow down to make sure we are truly connecting with God? Consider four Scriptural activities associated with genuine worship.

Stilling. For real worship to occur, we many times need to start by stilling our hearts and minds. The Psalmist recognized this reality. He revealed the Lord as saying, “Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10). The command to “be still” was issued in the context of a discussion concerning war (Psalm 46:8-9). Though God’s people were surrounded by bloodthirsty enemies, the Lord encouraged them to still their hearts and focus on Him. As children of God in a busy twenty-first century world, we are often surrounded by distractions and diversions that cause us to forget God. For real worship to occur, we first need to slow down and calm ourselves so that we can experience God’s presence.

Listening. Have you ever known someone who wasn’t good at listening? It can be hard to be around someone who talks too much. Those who seem like they are only interested in hearing themselves talk don’t usually build strong relationships. Healthy interactions require good listening skills. A similar reality exists in the spiritual realm. If we want to experience true transformation from worship, we must cultivate the ability to listen well. It is for good reason that Jesus often encouraged people to hear His teaching (Matthew 11:15, 13:9). Similarly, when He sent messages to seven churches in first-century Asia Minor, He was intentional to say something similar to the following to each one — “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). In Revelation 13:9, the Lord said, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen.” Personal and corporate times of worship will fall flat if you don’t make listening a priority. When you engage in worship, make sure you are “all ears.” Be diligent to hear and take heed to what God says in His Word!

Speaking. When the Psalmist decried the foolishness of following after idols, he said, “They have ears but cannot hear” (Psalm 115:6). Indeed, the gods men and women make have no real ability to relate to human beings. They cannot hear and they cannot speak (Psalm 115:5). The Lord is different. Because He is the living God, He has the ability to relate to His people in a soul-to-soul fashion. One can be confident that God will hear and respond when one prays to God. It is for this reason that the Psalmist often spoke of the way in which he “called” to the Lord (Psalm 28:1; 61:2; 86:3; 88:13; 119:146; 130:1). Worship isn’t all about listening to God. The Lord invites you to pour out your heart to Him as well. Tell him about your cares and concerns, troubles and trials. Talking to the Lord brings both a sense of release and relief to the soul. Talk to God!

Responding. Worship is never really complete until it produces some type of response. God intends for His presence to be transformational. Think about the accounts in Scripture of those who saw the Lord. Normally they had some type of drastic response. When John saw Jesus on the island called Patmos, he “fell at his feet like a dead man” (Revelation 1:17). Upon seeing the glory of the Lord, Isaiah cried, “Here I am. Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). Worship never comes full circle until the worshipper is compelled to respond to God’s will. Are your times of worship producing any type of change in your life?

3. We must be strategic to make personal worship happen.

The problem with many is that they struggle with making worship a practical part of their lives. Competing desires and demands snuff out aspirations for fellowship with God. Many live in a haze of hurry; consequently, personal worship never becomes a reality. Is there any help from Scripture? Let's consider four actions we can take to make personal worship a priority.

Removing. Sometimes we need to subtract some things from our lives in order to make room for what is most important. Such is especially the case in spiritual matters. Clutter, busyness, and misplaced priorities have a way of keeping us from connecting with God. The author of Hebrews made reference to the way in which superfluous stuff can sometimes keep us from God's best. He spoke of the need for believers to "lay aside every hindrance" (Hebrews 12:1). Is there any unnecessary baggage in your life — hobbies, extracurriculars, or frivolous pursuits — that keep you from spending time with God? Concoct a plan to remove them.

Relating. Many stall in private worship because they regard it as little more than a religious chore. They forget that it is primarily about a relationship. When Jesus talked about the subject, He said, "...when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matthew 6:6). The fact that Jesus referred to the Lord as our "Father" speaks volumes about the relational aspect of personal worship. If you can learn to regard Bible reading and prayer as an opportunity to relationally connect with the Creator of the universe, you will be more likely to engage in such things. Remember worship is a relational activity!

Replacing. Because of the busy nature of our modern lives, many assume they simply don't have time for God. They would love to experience the blessing of personal worship, but they've concluded that it's impossible for them to find time. I can relate. My numerous roles and responsibilities sometimes coax me to quit on worship. I think if we are honest with ourselves that we would all admit that our schedules are filled with some things that could be regarded as necessary. There are activities in our lives that we could replace with Bible reading or prayer — social media browsing, web surfing, television streaming. When we study Scripture, we find examples of those who strategically made place for worship (Daniel 6:10, Mark 1:35). May we learn a lesson from their diligence.

Redeeming. One tactic has greatly helped me in my quest to foster private worship. By looking for ways to meld it into other daily activities, I have created extra time for worship in my daily schedule. I've discovered that my daily commute, my morning breakfast time, and my evening bed time routine are all great opportunities to read Scripture, pray, or listen to an app that reads the Bible to me. I believe this practice is in alignment with Paul's encouragement for the Ephesians to make "the most of the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). Consider your daily schedule. Can you add some aspect of worship to things you already do on a regular basis?