

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Do You Draw Near?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 27:4; Matthew 22:36-40; John 4:23; John 17:3; Hebrews 10:22; James 4:8

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Who is God? What is He like? Every fledgling believer asks those questions-the answers he finds evoke wonder and praise. Do you remember that time? Your appetite for truth was insatiable, you attended every Bible conference you could, and you were faithfully involved in every ministry and program the church had to offer. Everything you learned about God filled you with joy and ignited zealous activity.

So, what happened? Sadly, I've watched many Christians lose the wonder of worship as the years pass. Life for them grinds on monotonously and church attendance becomes rote behavior-you sing, you listen to a sermon, you greet a few people with handshakes and smiles, and you go home.

If that sounds familiar, return to God by submitting to James' imperative: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8). To know the one true God is your glorious calling. Are you ready to draw near? Let me give you some practical encouragement on how to do that.

Understanding Worship

Worshipping God is the essence of being a Christian. Jesus explained that point to a Samaritan woman this way: "An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers" (John 4:23). If we are Christians, we are worshipers. Our hope of eternal life is really an anticipation of unhindered, unadulterated worship. "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). With that in mind, we evangelize the lost to gather more worshipers to fill our ranks. Worship then is at the heart of everything we are and do.

Tragically, many Christians today have set their affections on the temporal things of this world, exchanging their great privilege of knowing God better for that which is mundane. King David had the best this world had to offer-money, power, success, fame-and yet he said, "One thing I have asked from the Lord, *that* I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple" (Psalm 27:4, emphasis added).

Let me make an important observation at this point. I think some people get the sense that doctrinal precision equates to emotional sterility. Though we can all point to examples of that, nothing could (or should) be further from the truth. There is no lack of passion in David's psalms, and his theology-under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit-was impeccable. Knowledge of God to Him was "to behold the beauty of the Lord" and he wanted to meditate on it for the rest of his life. Does that sound like cold orthodoxy to you?

Here's a simple way to look at worship: Worship is an overflow of a mind renewed by the truth of

God. Cast in that light, delving into the truth of God's Word becomes discovery rather than dry and lifeless study. When you discover a great truth about God, you meditate on that truth-mulling it around in your mind-until it captivates your whole thinking process. That in turn will lead to worship.

Worship is really the outcome of two of the simplest Christian disciplines: Bible study and prayer. Study the Bible with the goal of discovering the wonders of God. Once you latch on to some great truth, fill your mind with it and ponder it in prayer before God. Your inner man will respond with righteous affections that will fill you with joy and renew your zeal to serve others.

Returning to Worship

So how do you get started? First, you must repent. The failure to worship God in spirit and in truth is not just an unfortunate lapse in spiritual enthusiasm, it is a sin. To love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and mind is not the greatest *suggestion* in the Law, it is the greatest *commandment* (Matthew 22:36-40). Confess your sin, clear your conscience, and get ready for step two-prepare to worship God.

Acceptable worship doesn't happen spontaneously-you must prepare yourself. Let's look at Hebrews 10:22. "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." That verse begins with the phrase "let us draw near"-it is our call to worship. What follows are four checkpoints to help you prepare for worship.

The Checkpoint of Sincerity

- We are to draw near "with a sincere heart." That speaks of a genuine heart, devoted to pursuing God. It is hypocritical to be worshiping God when you are really apathetic or preoccupied with self. Draw near to God with your whole heart.

The Checkpoint of Fidelity

- We are to draw near "in full assurance of faith." The Hebrews were clinging to Old Covenant forms of worship to find acceptance before God; but the coming of Christ put an end to ceremony and sacrifice. Each person had to be willing to say, "I'm coming to God in full confidence that I am not saved by a system of ritual. I come fully by faith in Jesus Christ." You too are to be fully assured that God accepts your worship, not because of what you do, but because of what Jesus did in providing atonement for you.

The Checkpoint of Humility

- We are to draw near to God "having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." That is, you come to God with the knowledge that you are unworthy to be in His presence. The only reason anyone can come to Him is the blood of Christ, which was shed on the cross as a cleansing for sin.

The Checkpoint of Purity

- We are to draw near having "our bodies washed with pure water." That refers to the daily cleansing by the Word of God. The process of sanctification ferrets out sinful thoughts and exposes sinful behavior. Before you worship, confess the sins that God uncovered through His Word so you can draw near in purity.

Every time you worship, whether corporately or privately, try preparing yourself by asking these questions:

1. Am I seeing God anew in the Word through discovery and meditation so I am compelled to draw near to Him?
2. Am I being sincere? Is my heart fixed on Him and undivided?
3. Am I fully assured that only faith in Christ can bring me to God's throne?
4. Am I coming humbly, realizing I can draw near only because of what Christ has done for me?
5. Is there any sin in my life I haven't dealt with?

Perhaps you've been attending church for years, but you've never really drawn near to God, nor have you sensed His nearness-even in your own private devotions and prayers. Now you know, or perhaps have been reminded: God has redeemed you so you can worship Him. It is the purpose for which you were created. Continue living in the light of the wonders you discover about God in His Word, and ask Him to teach you more and more by experience what it is to worship Him in spirit and in truth. That is a prayer our great God will delight in answering.

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