

**Re-Up. Part Three: Offer Up
Love Jesus, Part One: Worship Daily and Weekly
Psalm 84**

September 4, 2022

David Henderson

As I begin let me just say what a privilege it was to get away this week and to pray for each of you by name. A number of you shared specific ways I could be praying for you, and what a privilege that was for me. I'm blessed to have you as my church family and serve God in your midst.

I also want to thank you for your prayers for me this week! I have been completely free of pain all week, thanks to your prayers and God's kindness. As I mentioned in my video on our Facebook page, I'm in the Philippians 1.6 stage with my kidney stone, waiting for the One who began a good work to carry it through to completion. Meanwhile, thank you so much for your love and prayers!

Two Sundays ago we began our new fall series, in which we're walking through an overview of our calling and our approach to discipleship as a church. Let me just remind you of what we talked about last Sunday.

What we said last Sunday is that the Christian life begins with God's loving initiative. It all begins with God and his love for us as his people.

Indeed, *he loves his people;*
all his holy ones are in his hands . . .
Deuteronomy 33.3a

Which means the whole of the Christian life is a response to God. The life of faith is a lived-out response to the love of God.

Indeed, *he loves his people;*
all his holy ones are in his hands.
They follow in his steps
and accept his teaching.
Deuteronomy 33.3

He loves us, and we are called to follow in his footsteps, learning to love him and love others in response.

Love is the essence of the Christian life. We are called over and over in the New Testament to live a life of love in response to the love God has shown us in Christ.

Live a life of love. Ephesians 5.2

Follow the way of love. I Corinthians 14.1

Do everything in love. I Corinthians 16.14

Clothe yourselves with love. Colossians 3.14

Excel in love. I Thessalonians 4.10

Continue in love. I Timothy 2.15

Pursue love. I Timothy 6.11

Walk in love. II John 1.6

And if living a life of love is at the heart of the Christian life, then our Discipleship efforts should center on learning together how to do that – how to love.

You remember we've identified three overlapping dimensions to our call to live a life of love:

Love Jesus

Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.
Ephesians 6.24

Love His People

Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. John 13.34-35

Pour Out His Love on the World

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. James 2.8

The Scriptures teach that when we are fulfilling our call to live a life of love, we will love God, one another, and our neighbor. They also lead us to expect that a life of love will express itself in our lives in visible, tangible, predictable ways.

Love Jesus

- worshiping daily and weekly
- studying Scripture regularly

Love His People

- participating in Christ centered relationships
- using our gifts to serve the church family

Pour Out His Love on the World

- loving our (literal) neighbors
- making a difference in the world

This morning we'll begin walking through these three overlapping dimensions of our calling, and these six ways we can expect those commitments to love God, love His people, and love the people of this world to express themselves in our lives.

As we do that, our hope and prayer is that each Sunday this fall we'll be renewing our commitment to live a life of love.

We hope we'll be opening ourselves together to God's work as he seeks to bring these things about in us, in such a way that those commitment to live a life of love will express themselves in our lives in more and more tangible ways.

We also hope we can each be doing some personal wrestling during this series with what gets in the way of these things being formed in us. Are there other allegiances of our heart, other loves, other priorities, that get in the way? Are there places where our lives are too busy, too absorbed with other things, even good things, to give ourselves seriously to the things of God?

We hope this can be a time of noticing the shape of our lives, listening to the invitation of God, and cooperating with what God desires to do in us and between us.

May God make it so.

We begin this morning with the first of our three overlapping commitments to love – which is to Love Jesus – and we'll zero in today on the first of the two ways that we believe that will express itself in the life of a person who loves God – which is with worshiping daily and weekly

When we experience the love of God, our love will pour back on him in a life of worship. The love of God for us will result in a life of love for him, and one of the ways that will express itself is in our worshiping daily and weekly

There are two parts to that: one more formal and routine, one more informal and ongoing.

1. The more formal and regular part of that is our weekly worship

Gathering in person every Sunday with the rest of the church family, reenacting Revelation chapter 4 and 5, as God's people approach God on his throne, bringing him our worship and offering ourselves back in his service – we believe that recalibrates us to reality.

It reminds us of the truest thing of all, and surrounds us with brothers and sisters who share the same understanding of reality and with whom we have in common the most important things, who can love and encourage us in the things of God,

Sunday morning is our hard reboot. It's the time when we power off the computer, restart it, getting updates, addressing bugs that have gotten into the system, walk through a troubleshooting process, and ultimately run more smoothly.

That weekly in-person-together time is so crucial. Covid inertia has tried to convince us that it's optional, and cool and trendy new views of Christianity also try to convince us that we can worship just as well on our own, or out in nature, but that isn't true. And it's not biblical.

Hebrews 10.25

Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.

The cornerstone and starting point of our worship life as followers of Jesus is our weekly worship.

So how consistent are you in Sunday morning worship, not as an obligation, but as a response to the love of God for us, and as a source of life and strength and truth?

2. So there's a more formal and regular part of our worship life, once a week. But there's also the more informal and ongoing part of our worship life – our daily worship.

Some of you who have been part of the evangelical tradition for a while might be thinking that what we're talking here is having a quiet time.

That's the term that a lot of Christians have used since the middle of last century to describe a time set aside every morning to pray and read the Bible. That's when Intervarsity Press came out with a small booklet called, *Quiet Time*, which had a huge impact on the church.

It probably won't surprise you to learn that the quiet time wasn't a new idea. It was just a new name for an older practice.

The practice goes back well before that. In the 1800s it was called a "morning watch."

But it goes back even well before that. During the time of the Reformation, in the Protestant church, Thomas Cranmer, and Martin Luther advocated morning and evening prayer

And in the Catholic church, around the same time, Ignatius of Loyola, a Jesuit priest, advocated for time at the beginning and end of each day to focus on the Lord: a prayer of commitment at the beginning of the day

Here's an example: "Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my whole will, all that I have and all that I possess. You gave it all to me, Lord; I give it all back to you. Do with it as you will, according to your good pleasure. Give me your love and your grace; for with this I have all that I need."

and a prayer of examination at the end of the day.

And even before that, during the earliest centuries of church history, morning and evening prayers were encouraged by John Chrysostom and others.

Here's an example of a morning prayer from the first century, from the region of the church in Antioch:

O God, you are the unsearchable depths of peace, the indescribable sea of love, the fountain of blessings, the bestower of affection, the giver of peace. Open to us today the sea of your love, and water us with the bountiful streams from the riches of your grace. Make us children of quietness, and heirs of peace. Enkindle in us the fire of your love; sow in us reverence for you; strengthen our weakness by your power; bind us closely to you and to each other in one firm bond of unity; for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

And an evening prayer written by Augustine near the end of the fourth century:

Watch, dear Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ. Rest your weary ones. Bless your dying ones. Soothe your suffering ones. Pity your afflicted ones. Shield your joyous ones. All for your Love's sake. Amen.

While beginning and ending the day with prayer like that can be so important, the crucial part of that is not fulfilling a task or meeting an obligation, not putting a check mark in a box, but having a personal connection with God in those moments that spills over into the rest of the moments.

Sharon and I have a weekly date night. Imagine what would happen if I started setting that time aside each week to honor Sharon without actually spending that time with her.

Several years ago that's what I realized I was doing with my quiet time. I spent time with Scripture, and I spent time with my prayer list, but I didn't really spend time with God.

The way a quiet time is supposed to work is the same way a date works. You set aside a specific time to be together with the thought that that will spill over into the rest of your

relationship with each other, drawing your hearts closer and moving you to connect more often throughout the day and the week.

So morning and evening prayer was meant not to satisfy an obligation but to spark a connection and an affection that would run all through the day.

As Clement of Alexandria prays in about 200 AD:

Night and day until the last day of all, may our praises give You thanks and our thanksgiving praise You.

He's reflecting the invitation that we find in throughout the New Testament, such as in Hebrews 13:15:

Let us *continually* offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

God's love for us moves us to love him in return, and that love will find expression in worship that takes place weekly, when we gather as God's people, and also daily, as we give our lives back to God and offer ourselves in his service, and not only daily but all throughout each day, as we walk with God all through the day, responding to his loving involvement in our lives with praise, thanks, offering ourselves back to God, asking for his help for ourselves and for others, all through the day.

I'd like to spend the rest of our time looking briefly at one psalm that I think can help us in thinking about what it looks like to worship God weekly and daily and throughout each day. It certainly has helped me in that way.

Many of you know that each day, along with part of the gospels and other parts of Scripture from the Old and New Testament, I always read one of the psalms. Sometimes, if God is really speaking to me through that psalm, I'll just stay there for a while.

Well, for the past two months I've not been able to leave Psalm 84. It's a psalm about worship, not just more formal regular corporate worship but also more informal daily worship.

We're told in the note attached to the psalm that this is

For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah, to be accompanied by a stringed instrument.

Korah and his family members were Levites.

Their job, according to I Chronicles 9 and 26, was to serve as the gatekeepers of the temple (9.17). They were posted at the gates on all four sides of the temple (9.24) and they were responsible for guarding the thresholds of the temple (9.19). They would spend the night stationed around the “house of God,” because they had to guard it, and they were in charge of the key to open it each morning. (9.27)

So this psalm was written by someone whose fulltime vocation was standing at the thresholds of the temple guarding the gates.

The other thing that is important to notice is how they viewed the significance of the temple.

Reflecting the language used in I Chronicles, which refers to the temple as
 the “dwelling of the Lord” (9.19)
 the “house of the Lord” (9.23)
 the “house of God” (9.27)

the psalmist begins the psalm by speaking of the temple as God’s “dwelling place.”

Psalm 84.1

How lovely is your dwelling place,
 O LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

Solomon made clear at the dedication of this very temple that this *wasn’t* actually God’s dwelling place. The temple was just a symbolic physical way of expressing that God had made himself available to his people, that he was near to them.

I Kings 8.27-30

“But will God really live on earth? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built! Nevertheless, listen to my prayer and my plea, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is making to you today.

May you watch over this Temple night and day, this place where you have said, ‘My name will be there.’ May you always hear the prayers I make toward this place. May you hear the humble and earnest requests from me and your people Israel when we pray toward this place. Yes, hear us from heaven where you live, and when you hear, forgive.

But the psalmist seems to have lost track of that truth. He refers to the temple as God’s “dwelling place” in verse 1 and his “house” in verse 4.

At this beginning point of the psalm, his perspective seems to be: 1) I want to be near you, and 2) you are in the temple, so 3) I want to be in your temple.

Psalm 84.1

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of Heaven's Armies.

Psalm 84.2

I long, yes, I faint with longing
to enter the courts of the LORD.
With my whole being, body and soul,
I will shout joyfully to the living God.

Psalm 84.3

Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young
at a place near your altar,
O LORD of Heaven's Armies, my King and my God!

Psalm 84.4

What joy for those who can live in your house,
always singing your praises. *Selah*

In his way of thinking, the house of God is where God is present. The house of God is where the psalmist is present. Well, what joy for those who can live in your house.

Based on what we know about the sons of Korah, the psalm could have ended there. What joy to be where you are, Lord. And it is!

In New Testament times, we can see the parallel between approaching God in the temple and our gathering together with God's people for worship on the first day of the week. What a joy that it is, and how we encounter God in it!

But then the psalmist makes a turn in his thinking. What if – what if you can't be in the temple? What if something keeps you away from the temple? What then?

Well, then, what joy when you are *on your way* to where the Lord is!

Psalm 84.5

What joy for those whose strength comes from the LORD,
who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

But then there is another unexpected development in the psalm. When you are on your way to the temple, the psalmist realized, you don't just experience strength when you get to the temple, strength comes to you *on the way*.

Psalm 84.6-7

When they walk through the Valley of Weeping,
it will become a place of refreshing springs.
The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings.
They will continue to grow stronger,
and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.

I don't just experience joy when I'm with you in your temple. I experience joy when I'm on the way – even when I'm in the Valley of Weeping. Not just when I get through it. When I am *in* it!

I am refreshed by springs in the valley of weeping.
I encounter blessing when I'm in the valley of weeping.
I grow stronger in the valley of weeping. The Hebrew says "I will go from strength to strength."

The psalmist has to rethink his perspective.

Clearly it isn't just God's strength and refreshment and blessing that he experiences in the valley of weeping, he encounters God *himself*. God is *there*!

Psalm 84.8-9

O LORD God of Heaven's Armies, hear my prayer.
Listen, O God of Jacob. *Selah*
O God, look with favor upon the king, our shield!
Show favor to the one you have anointed.

What exactly is the valley of weeping? We don't know.

It could be particular place: the Valley of Baca. Or it could be any painful circumstance we experience in life. Or it could be all places outside of the temple itself.

Interestingly, in I Chronicles 9 we're told that the sons of Korah were among those who were taken into exile in Babylon, 900 miles away from the temple in Jerusalem, and held captive there for several generations. Now it was impossible for them to reach the temple. Maybe Babylon was the valley of weeping that forced the psalmist to rethink the presence of God away from the temple.

We don't know. But what we do know is that the psalmist has to rethink where his joy is found, and where God is found.

It isn't just God's strength and refreshment that is found "out there." God himself is found out there.

Psalm 84.10

A single day in your courts
is better than a thousand anywhere else!
I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God
than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.

And Lord, your courts are everywhere that I am, because wherever I am, there you are!

Psalm 84.11

For the LORD God is our sun and our shield.
He gives us grace and glory.
The LORD will withhold no good thing
from those who do what is right.

Even there, in the valley of weeping – especially there, in the valley of weeping – you are, and you provide, everything I need.

Psalm 84.12

O LORD of Heaven's Armies,
what joy for those who trust in you.

So listen to this repeated refrain about joy.

Psalm 84.4

What joy for those who can live in your house? Yes.

Psalm 84.5

What joy for those ... who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem?
Yes.

But ultimately . . . Psalm 84.12

O LORD of Heaven's Armies,
what joy for those who trust in you.

Here. Now. Whether in the temple courts or in the valley of weeping. What joy for those who seek you and find you and find their rest in you wherever they are, whatever their circumstances.

Wherever I am, you are. Whatever I face, you are in it with me. Wherever I am, if I am seeking your face, I am standing in your courts.

As you probably know, when the Bible speaks of joy, it is usually speaking of a perspective and a conviction more than an emotion. Joy is a settled confidence in the goodness of God no matter what.

What joy, Lord, for those who trust in you.

What might that look like? What could it look like to live in the courts of God always?

Imagine, say – I'm just pulling this out of the air – imagine someone you knew had a herniated disc, and then had to have surgery for that. And then, not long after, while they were still recovering, they had to fly to California to do a memorial service, and on one leg of the trip they had an incredible conversation about spiritual things with the woman next to him, but on another one sat next to a woman who was coughing uncontrollably the whole trip, and gave him Covid.

And then imagine that he discovered he had Covid just when he arrived in Idaho for his week with his covenant group which was to be followed by vacation in the Rockies with his wife, so he couldn't meet with his guys, and had to cancel his trip with his wife, and it took three weeks for him to recover, and then just a couple of days after he finally got over Covid he got a bronchial infection that lasted two weeks, and then just as he was recovering from that got hit with a kidney stone.

Okay, yes, that's what my life has held over the past few months.

But as I've been living in this psalm, and as its perspective and its promises have been working their way from the page to my mind, and from my mind to my heart, and from my heart to my soul, these words have become such a sweet invitation to me to walk through each day with the Lord in a posture of expectant

During this time being part of Sunday morning worship has become not something I want to do but something I *need* to do for my own encouragement, to be re-embedded in the embrace of the people of God, and recalibrated to the reality that God is on the throne

Each night as I lie down, I've been saying to the Lord, "What a day of joy!" Not because I feel joy, but because I am living in a posture of deep trust in the goodness and involvement of God throughout each day. And then, inevitably, as I've laid there, I've

been given eyes to see the ways that God revealed himself and his loving purposes all through the day.

And each morning, as I begin the day, I've been saying to the Lord, "Thank you for this day of joy!" Not because the circumstances are the way I want them – they rarely have been – but because God has been with me in them, and that leads me to lean into the day, to lean into him, with anticipation.

And then all through each day I've been reaching for the Lord and whispering, "I long, I faint with longing, for your presence, Lord. Better is one day in your house than a thousand elsewhere." And there he is, in the Valley of Weeping. And there am I, in the courts of the Lord.

What is God's invitation to you this morning, this week, this fall?

What needs to be rearranged in your life to make room for a vibrant life of worship every Sunday, every day, and all through the day?

How would God have you respond to his love for you with a life of joyful worship in response?