

**“Worship Is an Everyday Affair”**

**Sermon Series on *Worship Is!* #7**

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**Introduction.**

My favorite movie of all time is the film *It's a Wonderful Life* which stars Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. I still cry every time I see it. There's a scene in the film in which Harry Bailey wants to take his mother's finest china to use at the high school graduation dance. Ma Bailey cries out, "Oh no! Not my nice Haviland!", and she chases after him to try and rescue it.

In many of our homes we have a set of nice dishes, like china, which we use for special occasions such as Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving, and we have another set of dishes we use every day. The china is expensive, and we only break it out on special occasions and for big celebrations. And you would never think of using it for a picnic, or on a cookout, or to take to the high school dance.

I think many people approach worship in a similar way. It's something we only do on Sundays and on the high holy days of Christmas and Easter, but we can't imagine that it's something we would do every day during the middle of the week. It's only for special occasions.

I would suggest to you that God has a very different view on the matter. The Bible says that worship isn't just for special occasions or something we only do on Sunday. Rather, it's an everyday affair, and the follower of Jesus Christ will experience a change in his/her life when they learn to make worship a part of daily living. Let me explain what I mean.

**I. The Idols We Worship.**

Did you know you actually engage in worship every day of your life? Every single day you and I practice some form of worship. The question is what or who are we going to worship today? Is it God, or is it the idols of our lives?

Way back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the father of Presbyterianism John Calvin said, "The human heart is an idol factory.... Every one of us from his mother's womb is an expert in inventing idols."<sup>1</sup> Now, when most people think of the word "idol" they have in mind a literal statue, or perhaps the next singer who will be crowned American Idol. While traditional idol worship involving little statues still occurs in many parts of the world today, internal idol worship, worship that takes place within the heart, is something that is universal and it happens every day.

In Ezekiel 14:3, God says about the leaders of Israel, "*These people have set up their idols in their hearts.*" Like us, the leaders of the nation of Israel probably responded to the charge by protesting, "Idols? What idols? We don't have any idols!" However, what God was saying was that the human heart has a tendency to take *good* things – like a successful career, romantic love, material possessions, and even your family, and it turns them into *ultimate* things on which we build our lives. Our hearts worship them, because we think they can give us significance, security, safety and fulfillment if we attain them. Let me give you an illustration.

Do you remember what the central plot device was to the *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien? It was the Dark Lord Sauron's Ring of Power which corrupted anyone who tried to use it, however good his or her intentions were. The Ring is what Professor Tom Shippey calls "a psychic amplifier," which takes the heart's fondest desires and magnifies them to idolatrous proportions."<sup>2</sup>

It turns a good thing into an absolute thing, and it overturns every other allegiance or value. The wearer of the Ring becomes increasingly enslaved and addicted to it, because an idol is something we can't live without. We must have it, and therefore it drives us to break rules we once honored, and harm people we love, and even harm

ourselves, in order to get it. Just look at big name athletes who have used performance enhancing drugs. They've damaged their bodies and destroyed their reputations all in an attempt to achieve the idol of stardom.

What is an idol? Author and pastor Tim Keller says an idol is anything that is more important to you than God is, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God does, and anything you seek to give you what only God can give.<sup>3</sup> An idol is whatever you look at and say in your heart, "If I have that, *then* I will feel like my life has meaning, and I'll know that I have real value. If I have it then I'll feel significant and secure."

Some of the idols we have are *personal*, such as romantic love, having a wonderful family, earning money, gaining power, achievement, health, fitness, and physical beauty. There are also *intellectual idols*, which we could call ideologies. They are systems of thought other than biblical truth around which we build our world views. An idol is anything to which we look for hope, meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in ways that only God can provide.

Keller points out that the Bible uses three basic metaphors to describe how people relate to the idols of their hearts, and they are actually expressions of worship. They are the metaphors of what we *love*, what we *trust* in, and what we *obey*. What do you love? In what or whom do you put your trust? And who or what do you obey? When you discover the answer to these questions, you're well on your way to figuring out the ways you worship someone or something other than God every day of your life.

## **II. The Every Day Worship of God.**

I think the only way to find the ultimate joy and fulfillment that God intends for each of us is to figure out what the idols of our hearts and the idols of our culture really are, and then turn from them and turn to the living God of the universe who revealed Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. It's learning how to worship God every day and letting Him be the leader of your life on a moment by moment basis.

Several years ago, I heard Robert Webber say that the primary thing that occurs when we worship is a shift in the center of our being. We shift away from what I do to what God is doing, away from what is undone to what He has done, away from myself to God and to other people, and away from an uncertain future to a very solid hope. Worship re-orientes and re-centers my life. This is something that needs to happen not just on Sunday but every day of every week.

But how do we do this? In the book of Deuteronomy, we read of the holistic approach God encouraged the people of Israel to take when it comes to cultivating a life of worship. This passage is a blueprint for a comprehensive approach to loving God and nurturing others in the life of faith, and some people have described it as the *Magna Charta* of worship and discipleship.

**(SLIDES)** In Deuteronomy 6 we read where God says, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*"

These verses are known as the *Shema*, which comes from the opening Hebrew word of the passage that is translated "Hear." This was a prayer that every pious Jew said twice a day every single day. It was part of the regular rhythm of their lives, and it served as a constant reminder of what a life of worship is supposed to look like. The worship of God should involve every aspect of a person's life – heart, mind, soul and strength.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the worship of God should involve one's whole being.

Over the years some of the Jewish people interpreted this passage literally, and they made a practice of enclosing little portions of the Old Testament law in small cases called phylacteries, and they actually tied them to their hands and around their foreheads. But I think the meaning of these verses is that if you worship God He will be at the center of everything you *think* (the forehead) and everything you *do* (your hand). The passage also says that

God was supposed to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, with young people and old folks alike, and from the beginning of the day to the end of it. In other words, the worship of God was to permeate every sphere of a person's life.

I think most people have a hard time knowing exactly how to bring God into their world in everyday life. I was talking with two people in our church a couple of weeks ago, and it was obvious from what they said that it was a struggle for them to see how God could be a part of their work-day worlds. They could see how God was there in their lives when they were at church on Sunday or doing something spiritual, but they couldn't see how He was in the midst of what they did at the office working 9-5.

Last Friday, Elms Allen of our church gave me some new insights into all of this. He spoke at the weekly meeting of the New Canaan Society, and he talked about what are known as "thin places", and how God has shown up for him in the thin places of his life from time to time. A "thin place" is a phrase Celtic Christians used to describe a place or a time when heaven and earth come close together, and the distance between them is very thin – hence the phrase. For Elms some of the thin places have been walking on the beach at sunrise, visiting the American Cemetery at Normandy, and the near death experiences of some of the patients he's treated over the years. He went on to tell the story of the near death experiences of three of his patients. We were all blown away by the stories he told.

But I have to tell you, as moving as the stories were that Elms told last Friday, what was just as powerful to me was the way in which he has learned to see God everywhere every day. He has cultivated a life of worship not just here on Sundays but throughout the week, and he looks for God to show up Monday through Saturday. He has also learned to give the praise to God, and he realizes that he is on holy ground wherever he goes when the Lord happens to show up.

### **III. Bringing It Home.**

There are many ways I could suggest to you for how you can cultivate a life of worship in your everyday world, but I'll limit my recommendations to just three in the interest of time. The **first** is to suggest that, if you don't already do it, **begin to have a regular if not daily Quiet Time**. This was something I learned to do shortly after I became a Christian, and it has probably been the greatest help and made the biggest difference in developing a life of worship for me that is beyond just Sundays.

Reading a short passage of Scripture, writing in a journal, and spending a brief time in prayer, has a remarkable power to re-center my life, especially during busy or difficult seasons. Since Lorie was diagnosed with cancer last month, our daily Quiet Times have been lifelines for both of us. And they have helped sustain Lorie and me through this challenging period. We've also been amazed at how God has spoken to us through His Word in specific ways when we've given our attention to what He might want to say to us.

Most of us are busy people, and we have a hard time imagining how we can find the time to have a devotion or do a Quiet Time. But I would suggest to you that it's a matter of priorities, and putting the big rocks in first. When something is very important to you, you find a way to make time for it.

Get up 10-15 minutes earlier in the day, and do it the first thing in the morning. It doesn't have to be long, but it needs to be regular. And the surest way to learn to worship God throughout your whole life is by establishing a Quiet Time. I think you'll find that it trains you to look for God during the rest of your day. (If you're interested to learn more about how to do this, contact Amy Carlan, our Associate Pastor for Discipleship, and she'll give you some great resources.)

The **second** thing I would suggest is to develop a childlike faith and approach the world with wonder every day. I learned more about worshipping God in daily life from my children when they were young than just about anything else. Every day was a new discovery, and the simple things like a dandelion became an occasion of praise. "Look,

daddy, at all these little fuzzy things!” As we get older, we tend to lose that sense of wonder and amazement, and we need to rediscover what it is like to worship our heavenly Father with childlike faith.

My **final** suggestion is that you develop a habit of what a man named Brother Lawrence called “practicing the presence of God.” Brother Lawrence was a monk in a Carmelite monastery in Paris in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and he wrote a little book by the same title which has blessed millions of people since. His assignment in the monastery was to work in the kitchen where, in the middle of tedious chores and the orders he was given by his superiors, Lawrence began a discipline of practicing the presence of God in whatever he was doing.

For him the “common business” of the day, no matter how mundane or routine, became a medium of God’s love. The sacred or worldly nature of the task mattered less to him than the motivation behind it. He wrote, “The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees before the Blessed Sacrament [in communion].”

I want to cultivate that kind of attitude and approach more in my life. How about you? And what would it take for us to actually do that in the coming week? Think and pray about it, and ask God to show you the way.

### **Conclusion.**

There is something special about having a fancy meal on fine china with sterling silver and cut glass. But there is also something special about an everyday meal on everyday dishes where you don’t have to worry about using the right fork, you’re not afraid you’re going to break something expensive, and you never get relegated to the kids’ table. Each has its place, and each can be special.

As Lorie and I get older and our kids have grown up and now flown the nest, I think about all the family meals we’ve enjoyed together on our everyday dishes when they were growing up. And I’m grateful for all the memories we have of God showing up in our daily lives on an everyday basis. When worship is an everyday affair, He can take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. And He has a way of showing up and surprising you in an unexpected fashion if you look for Him. And that just makes the big celebrations all the more special.

In this season of Lent, let’s cultivate lives of worship in our everyday living for Jesus Christ, because worship is an everyday affair. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.11.8.

<sup>2</sup>Tom Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, p. 36. Cited by Tim Keller in *Counterfeit Gods*, pp. xiv. Many of the insights of this section of the sermon are drawn from Keller’s excellent book.

<sup>3</sup>Keller, *ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>4</sup>When Jesus quoted this passage He added the word “mind” to the list (Mt. 22:37,38).