

Introduction to Personal Worship

I. Three Essential Modes of Worship

- Corporate worship is the worship of a community of people gathered to engage in communion with God together.
 - Its fullest and most essential form is the worship service (liturgy) of the whole church assembled on the Lord's Day (Sunday)
 - Primary types of action (elements): reading and preaching/teaching of Scripture, prayer, professions of faith (creeds), offering of gifts, sacraments (baptism & communion), blessing.
 - More limited and occasional forms are worship in smaller groups of Christians, e.g., families/households, community groups, conferences, etc.
- Personal worship "face-to-face" with God: Times set aside only for focused worship.
- Personal worship "side-by-side" with God: Continual prayer woven through all of our daily life as an ongoing dialogue with God.

II. The Primary Elements of Personal Worship

- Hearing God through Scripture
 - Reading and studying Scripture to learn about God
 - Meditating on and praying from Scripture to engage in conversation with God
- Responding to God in prayer
 - Praise/thanks for God's character and acts
 - Confessing sin and seeking God's forgiveness
 - Lamenting suffering and brokenness to God to find justice, support and hope in God
 - Petitions/requests for God to act

III. How We Can Pray and Why We Should Pray

- Jesus prays, revealing the eternal dialogue of God the Father and God the Son.
 - Constantly
 - Jesus prayed as a regular practice (Luke 5:16), before daily work (Mark 1:35/Luke 4:42), after an exhausting day of work (Matt. 14:23/Mark 6:46), before a great decision (Luke 6:12), before a hard, risky conversation (Luke 9:18).
 - To strengthen faith, hope, and love
 - Jesus' prayers reveal and strengthen his loving trust and nearness to God the Father (John 11:41-42; John 17), whom he often called "My Father," even in his moments of greatest weakness and pain (Matt. 26:36-46; 27:46).

- The Holy Spirit shares the inner conversation within God.
 - The Spirit shares the innermost thoughts of God (1 Cor. 2:10-13).
 - The Spirit receives and shares the thoughts of Father & Son and represents and communicates the presence of Father & Son to us (John 14:25-26; 16:13-15).
- We are created by God to pray.
 - We are created in the image of the personal, relational, triune God who speaks (Gen. 1:26-27). Therefore, we are made to speak with God (Gen. 2-3).
 - Acts 17:28: “In him we live and move and have our being.” Prayer is simply expressing and living this truth.
- We are redeemed in Christ to pray.
 - Jesus prays for us (John 17; Heb. 7:25)
 - We pray and are heard because we are in Christ (John 15:4-7).
 - Our prayer reaches the Father and is gladly received by the Father only by praying in Jesus’ name (John 14:13-14; 16:23, 26-27).
- We receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to enable us to pray in Christ.
 - We are welcomed by God into God’s life (John 14:15-26). Father, Son, and Spirit make their home in us, and God’s word dwells in us. Spirit’s presence = Jesus’ presence = Father’s presence.
 - The Spirit listens and receives from Father & Son and speaks to us (John 16:13-15).
 - We pray in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20), who is the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9).
 - By the Spirit, we speak to God as children of God, i.e., as people who belong to God (Rom. 8:15-16).
 - The Spirit prays with us and for us, expressing what we cannot (Rom. 8:26-27).
- Compare Unitarian vs. Trinitarian models of worship
 - Worship is not simply our words and actions offered upward to God. Worship begins in God among Father, Son, and Spirit, and we are drawn into the communion of worship with God the Father through union with Christ by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in us. In worship, we act within and by means of the prior enabling grace and power of God.
 - Worship is not our initiative. Human worship is always response.
 - Worship is not a work of merit or achievement; rather, it is an expression of our dependence as creatures. Jesus defines his whole life by union with the Father, doing nothing by himself and everything by relying upon the Father’s will, word, acts, and mission (John 5:19; 5:30; 8:28; 12:49). So Paul Miller writes: “Jesus isn’t asking us to do anything that he isn’t already doing. He is inviting us into his life of helpless dependence on his heavenly Father” (*A Praying Life*). Thus, dependence is the root of worship. To become more like Jesus is to feel increasingly unable to do life on our own.

IV. Obstacles to personal worship

If we are created and redeemed to worship, what obstacles keep us from doing so?