



Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

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God's Expectations of Us, Lesson #2

6. God expects man's EXCLUSIVE DEVOTION

Devotion to God implies ardent affection for Him—a yielding of the heart to Him with reverence, faith, and piety in every act, particularly in prayer and meditation. We catch a glimpse of the true meaning of devotion from what is said of the centurion of the Italian band. He was termed “a devout man”* because he feared God, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. This is the essence of true devotion. He loved God, without which there can be no devotion. The more we love an object, the more devoted to it we are. Devotion is therefore love manifested. At the feet of Jesus stood a woman weeping and washing His feet with her tears and wiping them with the hairs of her head and kissing them. Is not this a picture of devotion? It is love and devotion expressed in action. Jesus said, “She loved much.”* The secret of devotion is loving much.

Every devoted Christian desires to be more devoted to his God. I am glad we can be. It is pleasant to feel in our hearts an ardent desire to love God more. A fond mother clasps her babe to her bosom. She loves it, and her heart is happy in that love; but she feels she cannot love it enough. She longs to love it more. Her heart yearns to love it more, though she loves it from the fullness of her soul. This longing to love increases our capacity to love. By being filled with air some vessels are made to expand. Unless filled to their utmost capacity, they would not become more extended. To the extent that the heart is filled with the love of God, man is happy.

To desire to be more devotional is not an evidence of lack of devotion, but, on the contrary, an evidence of devotion. Those who are the least devotional have the least desire to be more devotional. The heart that is fullest of love is happiest; and although it is happy and satisfied, yet it longs to move. Oh, how we long to clasp our arms more tightly about Him! How we long to have Him clasp His arms more tightly about us! How we long to nestle more fondly and lovingly on His bosom! What rapture to our love-flooded souls to receive of His caresses and hear His tender words! To the soul in the ecstasy of its heavenly love, the world with its pleasures has vanished away like a morning vapor.

It is not understood by all how and why we should have a desire to possess more of that of which we are already full. It is the desire for development, it is an innate desire; it is a principle planted on our constitution under grace. Let me repeat what I have said elsewhere: Every living thing consciously or unconsciously struggles to conform to type. When the little plant bursts through the ground, it enters the race in conforming to the type that it carries in its bosom. Thus in the heart of the acorn is a miniature oak tree. The little chick carries within it an

image of the mother bird, to which it will naturally though unconsciously conform.

In the natural world when things reach the highest point of development, they begin to decay or deteriorate; but this is not true in the spiritual world. Never in this life—and possibly never in that life which is to come—shall we reach the fullness of the type, or, in other words, the highest point of development. As the acorn or the little chick bears in its nature an image of the parent, so the Christian bears in his soul the image of God. This is the image to which he is to conform. Day after day he can grow in grace. Day after day the beautiful graces of the Spirit can become more beautiful and the exterior life be more perceptibly stamped with the holy image of God. There must be progress, or there will be regress. When a ball that has been thrown upward ceases to ascend, it begins to descend. When the fullness of the type is reached, then begins the retrogression. This is none the less true of spiritual things. The reason why there need be no declension in love is because the highest point of development is never attained.

7. God expects man's PRAISE AND DEVOTION

Praising God - The First Thing!

Do you know that praising God is the best thing to do first before anything else? Have you ever been in a situation that you feel all alone? Or have you encountered a difficult situation in your life and you don't know what to do, like losing your job or suffering the loss of someone very close to your heart? Consider the good times such as when you receive a raise from your boss or earn high marks at school? What do you usually do during these moments? Praising God makes every circumstance of our lives complete, essential, and eminently worthwhile.

Webster defines the word praise as to say good things about and it is synonymous to words such as admire, commend, extol, honor, and worship. A definition of Christian praise is the joyful thanking and adoring of God, the celebration of His goodness and grace. This simply implies that the act of praising is rightfully due to God alone.

Praising God - Why?

Why is praising God important? The reasons are countless. First, God deserves to be praised and He is worthy to receive our praise:

- "For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods" (Psalm 96:4).
- "Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom" (Psalm 145:3).
- "I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies" (2 Samuel 22:4).
- "You are worthy, our LORD and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Revelation 4:11).

Second, praising God is useful and favorable for us. By praising God, we are reminded of the greatness of God! His power and presence in our lives is reinforced in our understanding. "Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant" (Psalm 135:3).

Third, praise discharges strength in faith, which causes God to move on our behalf. "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger" (Psalm 8:2). Praising God also transforms the spiritual environment that we have. 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 clearly illustrates the

alteration that happened when the Levites gave praise and thanks to the Lord and the temple was filled with a cloud signifying the glory of God. "The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: 'He is good; his love endures forever.' Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God."

Fourth, God inhabits the atmosphere of praise. Psalm 22:3 says, "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (KJV). If we want to see a clear manifestation of God's blessings and grace, all we need to do is to praise Him with all our heart, our mind, and our soul.

Praising God - Who and When?

Who is to praise God? "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD," states Psalm 150:6.

- "I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips (Psalm 34:1)."
- "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands" (Psalm 63:3-4).
- "Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister by night in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD" (Psalm 134:1-2).

We cannot embark on the true joy and benefits of praising God unless we have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. As children of God, He dwells in our bodies through the Holy Spirit. This means that

wherever we go, God is to be praised. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 states that "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

Praising God - How to Praise and Worship God

How is praising God possible? Singing songs and hymns, clapping our hands, even jumping for joy...the list is endless. We can give glory and praise to our God with the use of our physical bodies, with our hearts and minds, and with our deeds. There are many ways to praise God! No matter how you praise and worship God, it should result in an awe of God's power, love, and grace for all of us!

8. God expects man to WORSHIP HIM

Praise and Worship - A Natural Desire

Praise and worship seems to be universal. Have you ever heard of an explorer finding a new tribe or culture that doesn't worship? Worship is a natural instinct and a basic need for every person. A simple definition of worship is to regard with great devotion or to honor as a divine being. Take a second to think about what you are most devoted to in this life and ask yourself, "Is it worthy of my devotion; do I worship a divine being?"

We don't all worship the same God, but everyone worships something or someone. Since we all worship, we should question the reason for this desire. The most logical conclusion is that we were created by a higher being for the very purpose of worship.

The ongoing quest of man is to find answers to the fundamental questions of human origin, human nature, and human destiny. There is one book that has the answers to all these questions, including our

questions about worship. The Bible is the wonderful and mysterious book that God has chosen as a way to communicate with us.

God is the focus of our devotion in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In Exodus 20:2-3, God says, "I am the LORD your God...You shall have no other gods before me." In Matthew 4:10, Jesus says, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." So, worship is not merely a natural instinct, it's a command from God.

Praise and Worship - Why Should We do it?

God alone is worthy of our devotion, praise and worship. He is God, our Creator, and we are commanded to praise and worship Him. Psalm 96:9 says, "Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth." Psalm 29:2 says, "Give unto the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

A.W. Tozer said, "Without worship, we go about miserable." God doesn't want us to be miserable -- He has a perfect plan for our lives. He has done so many things to show us that He loves us and doesn't want us to be miserable. He wants us to have hope for a future with Him --he wants us to have eternal life in heaven with Him.

A life of praise and worship fills our deepest needs, and amazingly, it also brings great joy to God. Zephaniah 3:17 states, "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

Praise and Worship - How Do We do it?

God tells us how to praise and worship him in His Word. John 4:23 says, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." In order to worship God in truth,

we need to know that Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." So, before you can worship in the way that God desires, you have to develop a relationship with Him through faith in Jesus, His Son.

The best way that we can praise and worship God is with our every thought and action. Romans 12:1-2 states, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Praise and Worship - Love from the Heart

Many people think that praise and worship is only singing songs at church, but it is so much more! It is also a condition of your heart -- a willingness to exalt God and yield to his will. Worship is an expression of love and awe to the God who gives us more than we deserve. Whether you express your worship by singing, playing music, dancing or in some other way, remember that you are called to worship God with your every action, every day of your life. God is holy, loving, and worthy of all our worship and devotion.

9. God expects man to be HIS SERVANTS

The Bible has a great deal to say about servanthood because the central theme of the Bible is the Servant of all—Jesus Christ. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When we give Jesus Christ His rightful place as Lord of our lives, His lordship will be expressed in the way we serve others (Mark 9:35; 1 Peter 4:10; John 15:12-13). How can

we demonstrate love for God? Our love for God will be expressed in our love for others. “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

True leadership is servanthood, and the greatest leader of all time is Jesus Christ. Servanthood is an attitude exemplified by Christ “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:6-7). The five words in the New Testament translated “ministry” generally refer to servanthood or service given in love. Serving others is the very essence of ministry. All believers are called to ministry (Matthew 28:18-20), and, therefore, we are all called to be servants for the glory of God. Living is giving; all else is selfishness and boredom.

It has been rightly stated, “Rank is given you to enable you to better serve those above and below you. It is not given for you to practice your idiosyncrasies” (General Bruce C. Clarke, USA, Ret). Let’s serve others by serving Christ (Colossians 3:23-24). God the Father has served us by sacrificing Christ on the cross for our sins, and we should serve others by giving the gospel and our lives to them (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6). Those who desire to be great in God’s kingdom must be the servant of all (Matthew 20:26).

10. God expects man’s PRAYERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO HIM

Man's highest aim should be to bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31), and this includes praying according to His will. First, we must ask for wisdom. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). In asking for wisdom, we must also trust that God is gracious and willing to answer our prayers: “But when he asks, he must

believe and not doubt” (James 1:6; see also Mark 11:24). So, praying according to the will of God includes asking for wisdom (to know the will of God) and asking in faith (to trust the will of God).

Here are seven biblical instructions that will guide the believer in praying according to God’s will:

1) Pray for the things for which the Bible commands prayer. We are told to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44); for God to send missionaries (Luke 10:2); that we do not enter temptation (Matthew 26:41); for ministers of the Word (Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1); for government authorities (1 Timothy 2:1-3); for relief from affliction (James 5:13); and for the healing of fellow believers (James 5:16). Where God commands prayer, we can pray with confidence that we are praying according to His will.

2) Follow the example of godly characters in Scripture. Paul prayed for the salvation of Israel (Romans 10:1). David prayed for mercy and forgiveness when he sinned (Psalm 51:1-2). The early church prayed for boldness to witness (Acts 4:29). These prayers were according to the will of God, and similar prayers today can be as well. As with Paul and the early church, we should always be praying for the salvation of others. For ourselves, we should pray as David prayed, always aware of our sin and bringing it before God before it hinders our relationship with Him and thwarts our prayers.

3) Pray with the right motivation. Selfish motives will not be blessed by God. “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:3). We should also pray, not so our lofty words can be heard and we may be seen by others as “spiritual,” but mostly in private and in secret, so that our heavenly Father will hear in private and reward us openly (Matthew 6:5-6).

4) Pray with a spirit of forgiveness toward others (Mark 11:25). A spirit of bitterness, anger, revenge or hatred toward others will prevent our hearts from praying in total submission to God. Just as we are told not to give offerings to God while there is conflict between ourselves and another Christian (Matthew 5:23-24), in the same way God does not want the offering of our prayers until we have reconciled with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

5) Pray with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2; Philippians 4:6-7). We can always find something to be thankful for, no matter how burdened we are by our wants or needs. The greatest sufferer that lives in this world of redeeming love, and who has the offer of heaven before him, has reason to be grateful to God.

6) Pray with persistence (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). We should persevere in prayer and not quit or be dejected because we have not received an immediate answer. Part of praying in God's will is believing that, whether His answer is "yes," "no," or "wait," we accept His judgment, submit to His will, and continue to pray.

7) Rely on the Spirit of God in prayer. This is a wonderful truth: "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26-27). We have the Spirit's help in praying. At the times of our deepest depression or sorrow, those times when we feel that we "just cannot pray," we have the comfort of knowing that the Holy Spirit is actually praying for us! What an amazing God we have!

What assurance we have when we seek to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh! Then we can have confidence that the Holy Spirit will accomplish His work in presenting our prayers to the Father according

to His perfect will and timing, and we can rest in the knowledge that He is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28).

Application/Activity

In this week's first lesson on God's expectations of us, we went through the first five expectations; fear and obey Him, trust Him, love Him, obedience to His will, and desire Him. I will text each of you a verse on Wednesday that has to do with fearing and obeying God. I want you to take the time to look in your Bible for a **different verse** that has to do with fearing and obeying God and text it back to me. That verse will be your prayer for the day. On Thursday I will text you a verse on trusting God. You will then text me a **different verse** on trusting God. We will continue this through Sunday for the first five expectations of God for us.

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