

Making Worship and Service the Centre of Our Lives

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Much of yesterday was spent on getting a good grip on the definition of worship and service. If I'm to talk on "making worship and service the centre of our lives" then I'd better concentrate on exploring the how's and wherefores of practicalising and internalising the profound truths we discover on these topics through our study of the book.

The key to serving our fellow man – to being a dynamically useful individual in the world is our personal relationship with the Father. I wonder how many of us, on a consistent basis, actually make a point of devoting regular times slots for going off on our own to a quiet place where we won't be disturbed, to communicate with the Father – to pray and worship. I'd like to raise my hand and say "I do" but if I'm to be truly honest with you I must say that while I would ideally like to be more regular and consistent, it's sometimes a bit like trying to allow regular times to exercise – sometimes I get all fired up and establish a regular routine, while other times I let it slip and get out of the habit.

How many of us can actually say that worship and service is at the centre of our lives? Regardless of how much we love God and desire to find Him and to do His will, finding time to worship can be hard when we have busy schedules. Many of us are on the go from the minute we wake to the minute we go to sleep at night. The demands of everyday living keep us from taking precious time out to go and find some alone time to commune with God. And often the busier and more involved in the daily struggles of living we are, the less we are able to slow down and take some time out. We may have small children, we may have a spouse that needs us, we might have a heavy work schedule, (or all of the above) or we may be just too darn tired to take that walk to that favourite quiet spot. And most likely the times we need it most are the times we're less likely to make the effort.

In reality it ends up being all about the choices we make and how we go about organising not just our external lives but also our inner lives. From studying *The Urantia Book* we've learned how worship, communion with our Father, is the key to the development of our soul – to our becoming more real as an indestructible spiritual being. We've also learned that the call to service is the direct outpouring of love to our fellow man as we succeed in experiencing the true nature of God through the worship experience. And of course love and service are the precursors to the realisation of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God.

So worship is really the fountain head, the fundamental premise from which everything else of spiritual value springs. If we're not taking the time to commune with the Father, or if we're not succeeding in making a connection that gives us that sublime experience of feeling that we've actually touched on His loving divine nature in some small way, then our spiritual quest can become a lot more of a struggle than if we have regular intervals of successful communion with the Father. Also our desire to live a life of service to our fellows as a result of loving God may not be very strong.

As with any relationship – the exchange between personalities – nurturing a friendship with the Father is similar to nurturing any other relationship. Love is the key – worship is a bit like the expression of a personal love affair with the Father. And like with any love affair, you need to keep it alive – keep the flame of love alight, you need to give of your self to someone you love and admire. You need to show him you care, do things you know will please him, tell him you love him, thank him for his adorable nature and fabulous attributes, ponder his attributes of truth beauty and goodness, feel his love and the awesome power and inspiration it can bring. Contemplate the power of his love

which is the source of everything and drives everything. Listen for feedback, have faith in that he's listening and attempting to commune back with you. Be still and listen... This is when you can start to feel and experience a spiritual presence.

But how do we get motivated to make those decisions to develop good habits that are conducive to worship and prayer. It may help to remember that we're the architects of our own lives... Energy flows where the attention goes. Our personal choices are the key to our own well being.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven are: sincerity, more sincerity, and more sincerity. All men have these keys. Men use them – advance in spirit status – by decisions, by more decisions, and by more decisions. The highest moral choice is the choice of the highest possible value, and always – in any sphere, in all of them – this is to choose to do the will of God. (p.435:7)

Cosmically moral and divinely spiritual character represents the creature's capital accumulation of personal decisions which have been illuminated by sincere worship, glorified by intelligent love, and consummated in brotherly service. (p.1287:4)

The affectionate dedication of the human will to the doing of the Father's will is man's choicest gift to God; in fact, such a consecration of creature will constitutes man's only possible gift of true value to the Paradise Father. ... there is nothing which man can give to God except this choosing to abide by the Father's will (p22:5)

And for anyone who might be agonizing over what it actually means to “do the Father’s will”:

The doing of the will of God is nothing more or less than an exhibition of creature willingness to share the inner life with God...(p.1221:2)

By this could we then say for anyone who agonizes over what it means to do the will of God, worry no more – for here it is in a nutshell: Exhibit a willingness to share your inner life with God and the rest must surely flow on as a result of this simple choice. Shouldn't this be a motivation to ensure we develop the habit of finding time for regular communion with the Father?

Once we're motivated and the decision has been made it's time to work on our technique. What I mean by this is that it's one thing to go off alone to some place quiet (hopefully in a beautiful environment), but it's another to quieten and still the mind and to be receptive to spiritual realities. Somehow we need to develop a technique for preparing our minds in such a way that our spiritual antennae are tuned to the right frequency. Eastern religions are teeming with gurus who will give you a “meditation technique”; the New Age movement is big on relaxation therapies. Everyone needs to find their own technique for stilling the mind and getting relaxed enough – we need to be in a state of relaxation in order to focus the mind on communicating with God and then stilling the mind in order to ponder God's lovable nature and character and to be receptive to the experience that comes through the expression of loving God.

Being able to relax is in my view a most important aspect to all of this. Sadly, I believe that our inability to truly relax the body and mind is one of the key elements to people's unhappiness and one of the chief inhibitors to effective prayer and worship. We can create our own misery just by allowing ourselves to be in a constant state of stress. Stress management – developing the art of relaxation – is a prelude to entering into a state of prayer and worship, and when you hit the heights of true worship you become truly refreshed and recharged in body, mind and spirit. So once we're sufficiently relaxed, how can we direct our thoughts to lead them to the upstairs compartments of our minds? How about starting by pondering a few simple basic truths about the Heavenly Father.

God is Love (p.38:6)

... love is the dominant characteristic of all God's personal dealings with his creatures. (p.40:4)

Love is the desire to do good to others (p.648:4)

Some hints for making worship work for us can be found in statements like this:

...we simply worship God for what we comprehend him to be. ... we render such devotion and engage in such worship as a natural and spontaneous reaction to the recognition of the Father's matchless personality and because of his lovable nature and adorable attributes. (p.65:5)

So what framework should we use during our meditations or worship sessions to ponder the “lovable nature” and “adorable attributes” of the Father. Here are some more hints:

... the most enlightening and spiritually edifying of all revelations of the divine nature is to be found in the comprehension of the religious life of Jesus of Nazareth.... If the incarnated life of Michael is taken as the background of the revelation of God to man, we may attempt to put in human word symbols certain ideas and ideals concerning the divine nature which may possibly contribute to a further illumination and unification of the human concept of the nature and the character of the personality of the Universal Father. (p.33:2)

... your greatest revelation of the Father's love is seen in the bestowal life of his Son Michael as he lived on earth the ideal spiritual life. (p.40:2)

As you ponder the loving nature of God, there is only one reasonable and natural personality reaction thereto: You will increasingly love your Maker; you will yield to God an affection analogous to that given by a child to an earthly parent; for, as a father, a real father, a true father, loves his children, so the Universal Father loves and forever seeks the welfare of his created sons and daughters. (p.40:1)

The experience of loving is very much a direct response to the experience of being loved. (p.39:7)

And what about service? This quote pretty much says it all:

All true love is from God, and man receives the divine affection as he himself bestows this love upon his fellows. Love is dynamic. It can never be captured; it is alive, free, thrilling, and always moving. Man can never take the love of the Father and imprison it within his heart. The Father's love can become real to mortal man only by passing through that man's personality as he in turn bestows this love upon his fellows. (p.1289:3)

Pretty powerful stuff – “the Father’s love can become real to mortal man only by passing through that man's personality as he in turn bestows this love upon his fellows....” (emphasis mine)

The impulse to serve God and man comes from an inner life experience – from the worship experience – of really feeling the power of God’s love and the inevitable urge to give our love back to him through serving our fellow man.

The motivation to serve is manifested in different ways. There’s the more unconscious serving “as we pass by” aspect which comes about automatically as a result of the “desire to do good to others”. If you live your life bearing the fruits of the spirit as a love saturated soul, then your spiritual fragrance will rub off onto those you pass by. There’s also the aspect of making more of a conscious

decision to do some things in particular which you feel would be useful to mankind – like getting involved in some kind of project that you think will be useful. Everyone will have their own unique and personal journey in their service lives and the key is for each of us to discover how we can be most effective.

So if we're so motivated to outpour this love to our fellow man – to give something back in selfless loving service, how do we then organise ourselves to get it together and to be effective in this department? For making service the centre of our lives.

Religion is not a technique for attaining a static and blissful peace of mind; it is an impulse for organizing the soul for dynamic service. It is the enlistment of the totality of selfhood in the loyal service of loving God and serving man. (p.1096:6)

I see this idea of “organizing the soul for dynamic service” as two-fold:

1. Establishing habit patterns and developing techniques so that we can actually communicate effectively with the Father, and
2. Getting ourselves into the right frame of mind, establishing the right framework for thinking that will help us to see more clearly what is the wisest and most effective way for us to serve dynamically – factual mediation.

This quote again:

Cosmically moral and divinely spiritual character represents the creature's capital accumulation of personal decisions which have been illuminated by sincere worship, glorified by intelligent love, and consummated in brotherly service. (p.1287:4)

Because the choices for dynamic service are so great and because you know you want to do things God's way, your regular prayer life becomes key to this process of decision making – talking things over with the Father. Laying out all the facts about your personal life, being truly honest with yourself and with God, understanding your abilities, skills and limitations. Taking everything into account and asking the Father for guidance and for strength, courage and wisdom to make sensible, practical choices about the best and most effective ways to serve.

Deciding on what to do and how to apply spiritual qualities to your service life is an incredibly personal thing and you should not allow outside pressures from people who try to tell you what you should do by way of service. Also beware of the guilty conscience – sometimes we feel guilt through conditioned programming or by people trying to tell you what you *ought* to be doing even though in your heart it feels all wrong for you personally. We need to learn to listen to our inner spirit to discern what's best. We need to establish a healthy self-respect; everyone has to figure out their own journey and be the Captain of their own ship. With God – the indwelling spirit – as the senior partner and with regular attempts at communication through prayer and worship, we should be able to navigate our ships through the most turbulent of storms in both our inner and outer lives and find ways of directing our urges to serve in wise and effective ways.

And to finish, let's not forget the acid test of the fruits of the spirit.

Fruits of the Spirit:

Loving Service

Unselfish Devotion

Courageous Loyalty

Sincere Fairness

Enlightened Honesty

Undying Hope

Confiding Trust

Merciful Ministry

Unfailing Goodness

Forgiving Tolerance

Enduring Peace