

How Central is Worship to You?

Psalm 26

Studies in the Psalms #27

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WHY do you exist? That's a huge question, isn't it? But it's one we must ask ourselves again and again. Some say we exist for pleasure. Live hard, play fast. Just have fun and feel good for as long as you can because you're going to die soon. Some say we exist for power. It's not personal, it's business. Get yours while you can. Some say we exist for prestige. Live for your fifteen minutes of fame. Some say it doesn't matter what we exist for. Life is an illusion, life is meaningless. Why do you exist? What do you say?

As we turn to Psalm 26 this morning, I can confidently tell you what God says about your existence. It may not be what you want to hear but it's what you need to hear. You do not exist for yourself. You exist because God made you to live in a relationship of mutual love—you experiencing his love and loving him in return. We do this throughout our entire lives but especially in public worship. Why do I say that? Notice that Psalms 26–28 focus on the theme of the Lord's house.¹ Psalm 26:8 speaks of the “habitation”

¹ Motyer, 72.

of God and that he “dwells” in his house. Psalm 27:4–5 speaks of the “house” and “temple” of the Lord. Psalm 28:2 speaks of the “holy sanctuary.” It was there that the Lord existed and it was there that David found his life’s existence.

Let’s focus in on Psalm 26 today. It’s what we call a chiasm. Verses 1–3 at the beginning correspond to verses 11–12 at the end. Then closer to the center are verses 4–5 and then 9–10. Finally we come to the center and focus in verses 6–8, which speak of God’s house and David’s worship there. To put Psalm 26 in our terms, it answers the question, *how central is worship to you?*

It’s the Central Focus of God’s Glory

Public worship is central to God. Psalm 26 teaches that worship is *the central focus of God’s glory*. Notice here in the center of the Psalm the imagery of verses 6–8: **I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O LORD, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds. O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.** Can you see it? David is using the imagery of the tabernacle in the wilderness, which literally was in the center of the Israelites’ camp. And as Mount Zion became central in David’s ministry, the tabernacle was literally elevated in national life. As he uses

tabernacle imagery look at what he says. He describes washing his hands in the bronze basin. Children, when you come in from playing outside to eat dinner, what do your parents ask you to do first? You have to wash your hands. Before Old Testament people could offer a sacrifice for their sins they first had to wash their hands because they were coming before a holy God. David describes going around the altar of burnt offering. We're stationary here today, but imagine giving the priest your lamb for sacrifice and then as he's offering it on the altar you're encircling it while you are thanking thanks for God's forgiveness to you!

The tabernacle was where God lived. That's what **habitation of your house** means. And it was **the place where** God's **glory** dwel[t]. This fact alone shows how central all that happened there was to the life of God's people. One writer described the difference between worship under the Old Covenant to what we experience under the New like this: "Our churches are places to which we go to be with him; his 'house' was a place to which he came in order to be with us."²

Let me bring what David is saying here one thousand years before Jesus Christ's birth to some relevance for us. We speak about "going to

² Motyer, 72.

church” but as I said from Psalm 24, it’s better for us to speak of “meeting with God.” And the reason we can say we’ve come here today to meet with God is Jesus Christ. All that David is describing here is a faint reflection of the reality that came true when the Son of God became our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember the Gospel of John’s famous words: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). That’s the word for the tabernacle. Jesus was the tabernacle on earth because he is God united to humanity. He is the dwelling place of God. And then John goes on to say, “and we have seen his glory”—sound familiar from our Psalm?—“glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is the presence and glory of God. And now he is risen and ascend to heaven. So when we gather down here on earth it is by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit that we ascend to worship him in heaven. We don’t need to wash our hands because Hebrews 10 says “our hearts [have already been] sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” We don’t need to offer a sacrifice because “we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.” And we don’t merely walk around the altar outside the Holy of Holies because there is a “new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, through [Jesus’] flesh.”

So public worship in the days of Psalm 26 was *the central focus of God's glory* and it still is, but the place of that glory is Jesus Christ at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

It's the Central Focus of Our Lives

Public worship was and is central to God. And this leads to our second point. Public worship needs to become more and more *the central focus of our lives*.

Did you notice the **affect** of worship on David here? **O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.** We talk a lot about loving Jesus in our day, but do you love his people, do you love where his people gather, and do you love the times his people gather to worship him together? Or let me ask it like this: when you sit down as an individual, as a couple, or as a family to plan your life, is the Lord's Day and public worship a non-negotiable? I know there are lots of variables like sickness or necessity of work, etc. but I'm not talking about that. I'm asking you, in your heart of hearts, how sacrosanct is public worship? Can you honestly say before God—you don't need to say it before me as I'm not your Judge—"Lord, I love your house and so I orient my life around it?" I know I've said this at some point in my 16½ years as pastor of this church, but I'll

say it again. And I know that saying this puts me and my family out on a limb, but I say it because we are trying to live it and I as your pastor am trying to be an example of it to you. I love the Lord, the Lord's Day, and the Lord's worship more than myself, my kids' sports, my extended family's demands, and our friends' invitations to parties.

Now notice the **effects** of worship on the life of David and on us. Let me state it in two practical points.

First, when worship is at the center of our lives it leads to personal prayer in times of need: **vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering** (v. 1). This sounds so strange to us, doesn't it? But it's actually pretty simple. David is being accused of something by someone. It reminds us of Psalms 7 and 17. Sound familiar to you? It's like us feeling accusations of our own consciences, from the world, and from the devil. So he's asking the Lord to sort it all out because he walks in the ways of the Lord and trusts the Lord. He's not saying he's sinless. After all, he just prayed in Psalm 25: "Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions...For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great." Also, here in Psalm 26 his reliance is the Lord alone: **for your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your**

faithfulness...redeem me, and be gracious to me (vv. 3, 11). Note well the shift David makes from **my integrity** in verse 1 to **your steadfast love** in verse 3. He's not saying he's sinless but that he whole-hearted and sincerely loves and trusts the Lord and he's asking the Lord to help him as he's promised to do for all his people.³ As Psalm 25 opened, "To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust."

Second, when worship is at the center of our lives it leads to personal holiness. Did you see the recurring image of "walking" here? **I have walked in my integrity** (v. 1), **I walk in your faithfulness** (v. 3), **but as for me, I shall walk in my integrity** (v. 11).⁴ And then there's another foot image in verse 12: **My foot stands on level ground**. And there's also the image of "sitting": **I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites** (v. 4); **I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked** (v. 5). Let's go back to Psalm 1: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers" (1:1). Holiness is negatively to forsake your own pleasures and the pressures of the world around you. And positively it is this: "but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day

³ Kidner, 118.

⁴ Note the links back to Psalm 25:21.

and night” (1:2) and therefore “he is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither” (1:3). And public worship should be—must be!—a catalyst as we go back out into the world to live godly and holy lives. Amen?

So why do you exist? You exist because God decided to create you. You exist because God desires to share his life and love with you. You exist because God delights in receiving your love, your praise, and your worship in return. Let’s pray.