



*While the deep'ning shadows fall, Light of light, on whom we call
Through the glory and the grace of the stars that veil thy face,
Our hearts ascend.*

From "Day Is Dying in the West"
Mary A. Lathbury, 1877

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THE FORGOTTEN GIFT OF EVENING WORSHIP

from Jim McCarthy, Senior Minister

When I was a boy, my parents gave my siblings and me a big, round trampoline. That gift brought us countless hours of fun, laughter, and exercise. So, when our children were old enough, Jordan and I decided to surprise them with a big, round trampoline for Christmas. As I bolted the frame together and strained to hook the canvas to the springs, I thought of how much joy it would bring them. But after the big reveal their enthusiasm quickly faded. Now, the trampoline sits forgotten beneath a carpet of old fall leaves.

For many, the gift of evening worship on the Lord's Day has suffered a similar fate. In this season of fresh starts and resolutions, here are some biblical, historical, and practical reasons you should cherish the gift of evening worship.

Biblical Considerations

While there is no biblical mandate for evening worship, there is a clear "morning and evening" rhythm established in Scripture. It is not insignificant that the God who bids us "remember the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:8) regards "a day" as an "evening and... morning" (Genesis 1:5). Thus, for Old Testament saints, the rising and setting of the sun was accompanied by the aroma of burnt offerings wafting from the tabernacle (Exodus 29:39). The "Song for the Sabbath" declares, "It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night" (Psalm 92:1-2). Psalm 134 also sings of the blessing of evening worship: "Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!" (Psalm 134:1-2).

This pattern seems to have carried over into the New Testament church, where we find Paul preaching late into the night on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Taken as a whole these verses shed a compelling light on the Sabbath practice of the church in Scripture.

Historical Considerations

These biblical considerations explain the church's historical commitment to morning and evening worship on the Lord's Day. The 4th century historian, Eusebius, said, "Through the whole world in the churches of God at the morning rising of the sun and the evening hours, hymns, praises, and truly divine delights are offered to God." The saints of the Medieval church met for morning and evening worship, or lauds and vespers, on the Lord's Day and every day in between. Citizens in Calvin's 16th century Geneva were expected by ministers and magistrates to attend morning and evening worship on Sunday. When the Synod of Dort met in the 17th century to address the errant views of Jacobus Arminius, they reinforced the importance of the evening service, insisting that it should be held even if the only people present were the minister and his family. Until the middle of the 20th century, morning and evening worship on the Lord's Day was a fixture in most Protestant churches. While this history is not binding, it is instructive.

Practical Considerations

I had never heard of evening worship until joining the Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC during seminary. After experiencing the gift of a second service, my wife and I decided that we would never choose to live without it. Here are some of the practical reasons we fell in love with evening worship:

Morning and evening worship promote Sabbath keeping by bookending the Lord's Day. Like a zipline between two trees, our Sabbath observance is pulled tightly by these two services. We are forced to see the day as a whole; to clear our schedule and say "no" to ordinary work and recreation for the sake of saying "yes" to "[delighting] in the Lord... [riding] on the heights of the earth... and [feasting] upon the heritage of Jacob" (Isaiah 58:14).

A second service not only means a second chance to sing and fellowship with other believers, it means a second sermon. If "man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4), and if "faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17), and if "the Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation" (WSC 89), then our single greatest need is the transforming power of Spirit-anointed preaching.

We discovered a special sweetness in evening worship. In *Devoted to God*, Sinclair Ferguson attributed this "extra" to "the cumulative impact of the word of God, expounded in the context of the worship of God by the people of God. We come on Sunday morning out of a world that has sought to squeeze us into its mold... But then we are fed in God's presence by God's Word, read, sung, spoken and prayed. Thus, when we come together later in the day, some degree of this transforming of our lives through the renewing of our minds has already taken place... Our thinking has been recalibrated in a Godward direction; our affections have been cleansed and drawn out in love for our Lord; our desires to serve him are purer, our affections for God's people are treated, and our wills are more submissive to his word. The more we are thus fed the more we want to be fed and to feed."

For all these reasons and more, may we call the Sabbath a delight and remember the gift of evening worship.

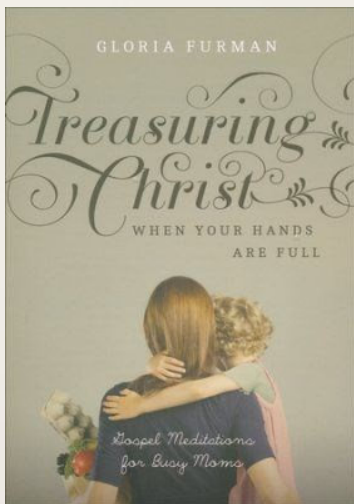
¹ Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 60.

² Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 149.

³ Godfrey, W. Robert. "The Reason for Dort." *Tabletalk*, January 2019.

BOOK REVIEW: TREASURING CHRIST WHEN YOUR HANDS ARE FULL

from Samantha Adair



I remember after our first child was born, and the sheer exhaustion of motherhood began to set in, desperately needing something “more”.

Though I was trying to implement Bible reading in between the feedings, cries, and naps, my heart was longing for some “deep heart check”

conversations from someone outside of my season.

One of the greatest gifts a friend can give in the middle of hard transitions is to come sit with you and engage you with heartfelt questions. I found that in the gem Treasuring Christ in the early days of motherhood. In the Lord’s kindness I was able to carve out moments to read the short chapters and soak up the rich words that were in them. As I read, it felt as though I was sitting across from Gloria Furman as she spoke truth into my life. She was gracious and truthful, compassionate yet convicting. Most of all she captured well the spectrum of joyful and bittersweet sacrifices of motherhood *as a means to loving Christ more*. This helped me to love the hard and the sweet moments even more. That’s part of the difficulty of loving our covenant children well: learning to lean into the faith-stretching moments while savoring the sweet.

If you are a woman like me in need for more compact truth, like a good coffee conversation with a loving friend who always points you to Christ, I would encourage you to pick up a free copy of Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full in the Book Nook next to the fellowship hall. I know I will be re-reading mine!

Reflections from a Lifelong Church Member J.P. CULPEPPER

My maternal grandparents were members of First Presbyterian Church, as was my mother (my father was the son of a Baptist minister). I was baptized here and have been a member for 88 years!

I have fond memories of the wonderful youth programs we enjoyed. Our teenage Sunday School class with 12-15 of us boys was where we learned many lessons about the Bible, honesty, duty, and love from Mr. Carlovits. We had an active youth group on Sunday nights, with no competition from TV or organized sports in those days.

Boy Scout Troop 11 was sponsored by our church, and it was the best in town! We performed many civic projects and learned how to be responsible citizens.

My Dad had a camp on the Pascagoula River, and each year Mr. C and Mr. Bishop would take us there for fishing and boating in the river swamps...wonderful outdoor experiences.

I served on the diaconate multiple times and was chairman when the church moved to our current location in 1990. Following the move, we experienced several years that were difficult financially. Often there was not enough money in the bank to pay the utility and mortgage bills.

Fortunately, we had several members on whom I could call in emergencies to make up the deficits. After many months of these calls, there was one member who, when he answered the phone, would just say, “J.P., how much do you need this time?”

Most importantly, at First Presbyterian Church we were always taught that the Bible was truly God’s word.



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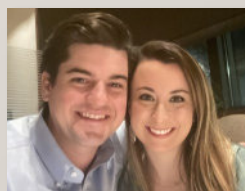


WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

These individuals were received into membership on December 12, 2021:



Josh & Samantha Adair
Caleb, Daniel & Kathryn



Peter & Miriam Boehme



Chamberlan & Cassi Carothers
Davis, Brewer & Patrick



Connor Chancellor



Zeek & Marian Dean
Gary, Gabrielle & Gian



Stephen & Lauren English
Stevie & Danny



Joe & Robin Gordy



Hank Hawes



John & Charlotte Pearce



Rick & Lara Youngblood