

Drawing Nigh unto the Lord



David Wilkerson February 2, 2015

In the Old Testament, high feast days in Jerusalem were an incredible event. Three times a year, Israelites from across the land journeyed to the temple in Zion to take part in the feast days. It was the most religious thing the people could do. The priests likened it to “coming near to the face of God,” or “drawing nigh to the Lord.”

Israelites from all walks of life stood in long, winding lines in the temple courtyard, waiting for priests to examine the animals they’d brought for sacrifice. Then came the moment of sacrifice. The high priest slew the animal, let the blood drain from its carcass, and sprinkled it in various places around the altar. Then, as the sacrifice burned on the altar, incense filled the air, bringing a sweet aroma.

This is a picture of the modern-day church of Jesus Christ. God’s people come to church to draw near to him, bringing sacrifices of praise and sweet incense through their prayers. Like the Israelites, they are entering God’s holy presence, obeying his command to draw nigh to him.

For decades, the prophet Isaiah witnessed these sacrificial offerings in Israel. At one point he saw the priests grow corrupt and God’s house become polluted. The people lived as they pleased, bringing sacrifices halfheartedly and going back to sinful lifestyles. Their attitude was, “I’ve done what’s required of me. I’ve drawn near to God.”

Finally, God sent Isaiah to the temple during the high feast days to deliver a stern message: “Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah” (*Isaiah 1:10*). Imagine the people’s shock as they heard these words. The prophet continued: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats” (1:11).

God was saying, “You line up with your sacrifices and call it worship, but it’s an abomination to me. Your heart isn’t in any of these sacrifices. You draw near to me, but your mind is elsewhere. It’s all a charade. Away with it!”

I believe Isaiah’s message is especially important to Christ’s church today. In fact, Jesus took the prophet’s message and applied it to his own day: “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias [Isaiah] prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (*Matthew 15:7-8*). Christ was saying, “When Isaiah prophesied, he was talking about you.”

We can apply these prophecies to our own day as well. Right now, churches are busily promoting praise conferences and worship seminars. Yet how many who attend these gatherings ought to hear Isaiah’s prophecy? According to the Lord, only clean hands and a pure heart will ascend his holy hill. But how many Christians enter into worship with hearts full of lust, their minds set on worldly things?

We live in the most enlightened generation of all time. Yet, as I see it, Christians today understand very little about what it means to draw near to God. We must settle the issue once and for all: God will not accept prayer or praise from hypocrites who approach him haphazardly.

I remember a time in my life when I prayed over the following verse: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to

you" (*James 4:8*). My heart's cry was, "Lord, woo me, draw me nearer to you. I want to be closer to you than I've ever been. Lord, reveal yourself to me as never before."

God answered me, but not with the response I expected. Instead, he replied with a question: "Why do you want to draw near to me, David? What is your motive in desiring this?" My first thought was, "That's obvious. It's what Christians do. Our walk of faith is about getting closer to you, and about you drawing closer to us. I just want to be closer to you, Lord." Once again, the question came back to me: "Why, David? I know your heart, your motive, in wanting more of me in your life. But do *you* know your motive?"

The fact is, every Christian senses the Holy Spirit calling him or her to greater intimacy with the Father. That urging will continue until the day we go home to heaven. The Holy Ghost will continually move on our hearts to go deeper, draw closer, seek greater intimacy with the Father. But there is such a thing as drawing nigh to God with improper motives. In other words, we can desire to be near him but for all the wrong reasons. I want to consider some of the wrong motives for drawing near to the Lord.

We miss the purpose of drawing nigh to God if we do all the talking and no listening.

All of us want to leave God's presence edified. We want to take our burdens to him and leave them there, and we want to shower him with praises. So, when we enter his presence, we start by talking. But many of us end up doing all the talking and no listening. It's a one-sided fellowship. We spend hours praying and worshiping in secret and come out feeling great. But we never allow God to speak his mind to us. If we don't give him equal time, we're trampling through his court like tourists.

The Lord wants to be able to govern us, speak to us, answer all our questions. He longs to show us how to overcome sin and get free from bondage. He wants to bless our marriage, our family, our ministry.

And in both Testaments, the biblical pattern is clear: God speaks only to those who draw near to him to *listen* as well as to worship.

Elijah declared, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand..." (*1 Kings 17:1*). The Hebrew word for "stand" signifies to tarry, meaning to remain or wait. Because Elijah waited before the Lord, he heard from God and was anointed to speak his word. And God was always faithful to give the prophet direction.

For example, Elijah was praying patiently when he received word to build an altar on Mount Carmel. At the time, Israel's King Ahab was out to kill Elijah, but the prophet didn't bat an eye. He boldly stopped Ahab's chariot and said, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand... Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty" (*18:15, 19*).

How did wicked Ahab respond? He obeyed everything Elijah commanded him to do. Amazing! Even demons tremble at the words of someone who's heard from God. When such a believer emerges from the Lord's presence, he speaks with authority.

We see the same pattern in the New Testament. Those who waited in God's presence received his direction. Acts tells us, "Peter went up upon the housetop to pray" (*Acts 10:9*). As Peter was praying, he fell into a trance and couldn't pray or say a word. Evidently, God wanted Peter to be still, so he could speak something important to him. Then the Holy Ghost woke him up and spoke to him three times on the rooftop, with clear, specific directions: "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them" (*10:19-20*).

Paul experienced this as well. In Antioch, he met some godly men who were waiting on the Lord. Again, the voice of God came: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (*Acts 13:2*). Once more, God's direction was specific and clear.

Whenever God finds such a waiting people, full of faith and unhurried in his presence, he speaks.

Any "trampler" can enter God's presence with praise and prayer. He makes his offering and voices his petition, but soon he's gone, hurrying back to his worldly concerns. God waits until such tourists have left before he makes his presence known. He entrusts his direction only to those who wait on him. Some need a fresh touch from him. Others need freedom from bondage. Some desire simply to minister to the Lord with psalms and songs of love. Others listen for a word of hope in their time of trouble. Still others only want to be his oracle to the lost and seek

his word for them. Whenever God finds such a waiting people, full of faith and unhurried in his presence, he speaks. His word comes to all who wait and ask in faith.

God promises if we draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to us. And he comes to us for one purpose: to govern our lives. He wants to give us direction and speak his peace to us. "Blessed are all they that wait for him.... He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.... And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:18-19, 21).

I believe this passage sums up everything it means to draw near to God. And Jesus set the example, slipping away to the mountains and other secret places to wait on the Father. He submitted himself so he could receive daily direction. And the Father responded by drawing near to him every morning, waking his ears and giving him a word. Christ was never left in confusion. He heard clearly from the Father because he waited faithfully on him daily.

I believe the same is possible for all of God's children. Perhaps you've waited on the Lord through a long season of night when no word has come. I urge you, be patient. Believe his word will come to you in the morning. Your Father will open your ears, just as he did with Christ. And he will speak clearly to your need.

"Blessed is the man whom thou *choosest*, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple" (Psalm 65:4). Note here: God *chooses* us. Do you feel yourself being drawn to the Lord? Do you feel more and more of a pull into prayer? Does your soul cry out for a closer walk with God? The Lord has chosen you, calling you to himself—to worship all the day long, to hear his word at all times, and to be fully satisfied with his goodness, even in the midst of your trials.

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