

Text: Psalm 86:8-13

“Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths of the grave.” (Psalm 86:11–13)

You probably realize that the heart is a vital organ to the human body. There are so many things happening inside of us that are connected to the work it does. We would be in serious trouble, if that muscle suddenly stopped beating. I learned some interesting facts this week about the heart: Your heart is about the size of a fist. It weighs around 10 ounces, which is roughly half of one percent of your total body weight. That’s not very big when you consider all that it does. The “thump-thump” sound you hear is caused by the opening and closing of the four valves within your heart. An average adult heart beats 72 times a minute. That equals 100,000 heartbeats a day, or 3.6 million heartbeats in a year. The heart is busy; it can move 5-7 liters of blood every minute. Over the span of the average lifetime that would be the equivalent of leaving your kitchen faucet on all the way for 45 years. Apparently, laughter really is good medicine. A good laugh will send up to 20% more blood flowing through your body.
(<http://www.1mhealthtips.com/10-fascinating-facts-about-the-human-heart/>)

When something goes wrong, with our heart, it can cause serious health issues. Your doctor might send you to the hospital for a heart catheterization, or some other test, if he suspects a problem. It’s amazing how these scans can allow us to look inside and see what is happening in our heart.

Scripture has a lot to say about the heart, not the physical organ that pumps blood through your body, but the innermost part of who you are. Throughout the Old and New Testament, the word is used more than a thousand times to describe the center of our spiritual, moral, and intellectual life. One Bible Dictionary puts it this way, “It is essentially the whole person, with all their attributes... It is the heart which makes a man what he is, and governs all his actions. Character, personality, mind and will are all terms which reflect the biblical meaning...” (*New Bible Dictionary, 3rd edition Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 1996 p.456*) So if I were to say, “I really appreciate your heart,” I’m not talking about the organ inside your ribcage, I’m talking about your character and all that make you who you are. Or if I say, “his heart is in the right place” I’m not referring to something that can be measured on an MRI or a CT scan. I’m pointing to the deeper motives that guide you. We can’t always tell what’s going on inside of another person, but the Lord can. He sees the innermost recesses of our soul.

And so if our worship is going to be pleasing to God, it must come from our heart.

That's why David prayed, in Psalm 86, "give me an undivided heart." He realized how easy it is for our hearts to become distracted. Our affections can grow cold. There are times when our heart is being pulled in several directions, and we have to decide which pursuit to follow. David wanted to glorify God with all his heart, and that should be our desire as well. Scripture shows us what that kind of worship looks like, when it is lived out in our lives:

1. If we are going to worship God with all our heart, we must offer genuine praise.

It's not enough for us just to mouth the words of a song, or to repeat the words of a prayer, we have to mean it. If we don't, our songs and our prayers will ring hollow. As we read through the psalms, that's exactly what we find. David wasn't trying to impress anyone, or win any literary awards. These were heartfelt words spoken to God. While the psalms have certainly inspired millions of people throughout the ages, that wasn't the primary reason that they were written. David was speaking honestly, from the heart, lifting his prayers and petitions to God. David's relationship with God was genuine and real.

Sadly, that wasn't always the case with Israel's worship. If you want to hold your place here, turn with me to the NT, to Mark 7, where Jesus finds himself in dispute with the Pharisees about their traditions. The Pharisees were the most religious people you could find, but their religion was often shallow and superficial. On the outside they looked the part, but on the inside there was something wrong. To them, worship was all about rituals and regulations. You were supposed to do certain things, a certain way, and if you didn't they were right there to criticize you. That's what was happening Mark 7:5-8. The passage reads,

"The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 'But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.'"

The conflict, here, was over something silly. The Pharisees were bent out of shape because the disciples didn't wash their hands a certain way before sitting down to eat. It's not that they were concerned about germs or personal hygiene. This was a ritual the people were supposed to observe after being out in public. You never know the kind of people you might bump into, out in the world, so if you don't want to be contaminated (by coming into contact with sinners and tax collectors) you ought to wash your hands before you sit down for a meal. The Pharisees were grumbling, "why are your disciples eating with impure hands?" The implication was that the disciples must not have been very spiritual, if they neglected the traditions. But Jesus goes on to criticize the form of worship practiced by the Pharisees. It's not that He cared whether or not they washed their hands, but the problem was much deeper. For all of their religious activity, the most important element was missing – their heart. It may have seemed as if they were close to God, but in reality they were a million miles away. They were doing all the right things, but for all the wrong reasons. Jesus called them "hypocrites," because their actions had nothing to do with honoring God; they were more interested in putting on a show. They might have been able to impress the crowds, but God was not impressed. He saw right through their actions.

Jesus quotes a passage from Isaiah, where God exposed the emptiness of Israel's worship. It wasn't that they had walked away from God altogether. They still showed up at the appointed times. They still brought their sacrifices to the temple. They still attended the religious ceremonies. But in all of this, their heart was missing. Basically, they were just going through the motions. They put their brain on cruise control and were mindlessly doing what they were told, not because they wanted to but because they were supposed to.

I love cruise control, in my car. It's pretty much a standard option these days. I use it all the time, when I'm on the highway. If the speed limit is 70, I set it to 70 and just go. All I have to think about is staying in my lane, occasionally passing someone who is going too slow. Cruise control is great, but it's easy to ignore the signs along the highway and forget where you're going. You can pass right by the exit, without even noticing, and pretty soon you look up and realize you've driven 20 miles out of your way. That can be a very real danger in our worship. We become complacent, coasting through the service each week, as if we were on spiritual cruise control. We no longer consider what we do or why we do it. It's just a pattern that we've settled into. We've sung these songs so many times that we no longer have to think about the words. We show up when we're supposed to, and do all of the right things, that are expected of us, but our hearts are not engaged. We are just sleepwalking through the service. We're just going through the motions. It's not that we stop worshipping God altogether, but like the Pharisees we become so focused on the outside we forget God is concerned about the inside too.

When our worship becomes more about ritual than our relationship with God, we may become critical of others. "Hey, he didn't fold his hands when the pastor was praying, I'd better watch that guy. Doesn't he know that our prayers are more effective when our hands are folded?" We become so focused on whether or not others are following the traditions that we neglect the condition of our own heart. Or we may find ourselves wanting to rush through our times of worship. "It's Sunday, I'm here, let's get this over with as quickly as possible so I can get back to enjoying my Sunday." When the service goes over a few minutes we become agitated, because we have places to be and things to do today. We walk out the doors unchanged, unmoved, unaffected. The sermon is always exactly what someone else needed to hear, but we may not stop and consider what God was saying to us.

If our worship seems hollow or empty, we need to pray, "Lord, open my heart that I might hear you, and allow you to work in me, that I might honor you in what I do." Real worship is genuine, and sincere. It is not done for outward show, or because it's what is expected of us.

2. If we are going to worship Him with all our heart, we must offer passionate praise.

This was a quality that was present in David's worship. On one occasion, when the priests were bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, he led the procession leaping and celebrating the entire way (*1 Chronicles 15:29*). All throughout the psalms, we see his hunger and thirst for the Lord. In **Psalm 86:12** he cries out, "*I will praise you, O Lord my God; with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.*" We hear, in these words, David's deep affection for the Lord. He is not addressing a stranger, or a mere acquaintance. David enjoyed a deep and intimate relationship with God.

Notice the extent of his love for God. He doesn't say: "I will praise you with part of my heart," or maybe on good days "I will praise you with most of my heart my heart." He pledges his complete and undying affection.

We're reminded of the charge Moses gave to the children of Israel, in Dt. 6:4-5, what has been called the greatest command in all of Scripture. He told them: "*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*"

It is an amazing thing that the God of the universe loves us, as much as He does, but what's even more amazing is that He invites us into a relationship in which we are able to express our love for Him. As we come to know Him more each day, we can't help but fall deeper and deeper in love.

There is an emotional component to worship. As we sing songs of praise, we can't help but experience a passion for God stirring within our heart. We are excited about who He is and the things He has done. I hope we don't come stumbling into church, half asleep, mumbling the songs in a monotone voice, with bland expressions on our face. No – there ought to be an enthusiasm bursting forth that we can't hold back. I guarantee it was present in the heart of David as he wrote these words: "*For great is your love toward me; you have deliver me from the depths of the grave.*"

I like what one author says when he writes, "When feelings are dead, so is our worship. How would it fly if I said to my wife, 'Well, honey, this is the time when I am supposed to tell you I love you. So, here goes: I love you. Have a good day at work, see you tonight.' Would you agree that she's not going to feel very cherished when she hears that? It's probably not going to work for her? It's not working with God either." (James MacDonald "Walk in the Word" <http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/walk-in-the-word/read/articles/discovering-the-heart-mind-and-soul-of-worship-8334.html>)

When you go to a wedding, there is a special part of ceremony, after the vows are said, and the rings are exchanged, and the unity candle is lit, when the pastor pronounces the couple husband and wife. Before they turn, and walk down the aisle he says, "you may now kiss the bride." How many weddings have you been to where the couple looks at each other and responds, "nah, I think a handshake will do, or how about a high five?" I've never been to a wedding where that has happened. We would really wonder about that couple. What, aren't you excited, you've just pledged your heart to the love of your life.

What should we feel, as we worship Him? **A sense of longing:** Psalm 42 says, "*As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God...*" (Psalm 42:1) **A sense of reverence:** The psalmist declares, "*Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.*" (Psalm 33:8) **A sense of gratitude:** Psalm 100:4 tells us, "*Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise, Give thanks to Him, bless His name, for the Lord is good...*" **And a sense of delight:** "*...In Your presence there is fullness of joy...*" (Psalm 16:11)

3. If we are going to worship God with all our heart, we must offer exclusive praise.

Again, in Psalm 86:11 David prays, *“Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.”* It might seem surprising to hear David ask God to hold his heart steady, and to give him wholehearted devotion. After all, Scripture tells us that David was a man after God’s heart; we might get the impression that it came easy for him, that his heart was always focused towards the Lord. But that wasn’t always the case. David understood how erratic the human heart can be, and how quickly our hearts can begin to wander from the God we love.

Our lives become busy, and we become distracted by other demands, and soon we lose sight of the Lord, and go throughout the entire day forgetting that He is there. At night, we lay our head on the pillow, intending to spend time in devotions, but before we can reach for our Bible we drift off to sleep. Morning comes too quickly, and we are running late. We have to get the kids off to school, and get ourselves to work. Before we know it, the entire week has gone by and we realize that we have hardly uttered a single prayer. God has been present the entire time, but we have not been present with Him.

We need to pray for an undivided heart. “Lord, bind my heart to yours, and make me wholeheartedly committed to you!” God doesn’t simply want us just to carve out a little space in our heart for Him; He wants the whole thing. He’s not content to share our affections; He wants to be our one and only love. He is not asking to be a part of our lives; He wants our whole world to revolve around Him. Maybe that sounds like He’s asking a lot, but He is God after all, and we owe Him our very lives to Him. More than that, we won’t be able to find balance or peace in our lives until we offer Him our entire heart.

Sometimes people are afraid to give their lives entirely over to Christ. They’re only looking for a little religion, enough to give me comfort through the storms of life, knowing that the Lord is there when troubles come, but other than that they prefer to continue doing their own thing. But that’s not worship, at least not the kind of worship that pleases God. Real worship is opening up our entire heart to the Lord and inviting Him to enter in to every facet of our lives.

Charity and I took the kids to swim lessons at the college, last weekend. They were excited. They love the water. They’ve had a blast at the pool this summer, and were thrilled to swim in the indoor pool. When we checked them in, they were matched up with an instructor from the swim team, and then we went upstairs to sit on the bleachers with all the other parents. We saw Shay. She was having a blast splashing, and jumping into the water. We saw Aireanah. She was holding on to a floatie and zipping around the pool in no time. But we couldn’t see Jordan. We kept looking, and looking, and finally Charity spotting him sitting at the edge of the pool with his feet dangling in the water. He wanted to be close to the pool, but he didn’t want to get in the pool. After the lesson, we asked him “why didn’t you get in?” He didn’t want to get wet. A lot of people are content with ankle deep religion, but God wants us to be all in, offering every facet of our lives to Him, all the time, every day of the week. If our hearts are not fully engaged, if we are holding back, then it isn’t really worship. What’s holding you back? What’s getting in

the way? What's competing for your affection, or keeping you from loving the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might?

Conclusion –

A man walks out of church one Sunday with his arms folded. “Terrible, terrible,” he mutters. “What do you mean?” his wife asks. “It was a terrible service,” he answers, “a total disaster!” “Well I thought it was wonderful,” she replies.

“Didn’t you hear the singing of the person behind us? He couldn’t carry a tune.” “Do you mean ole Bob?” she replied. “He is one of the most genuine people I know, he may not be the best singer in our church, but he means every word and that’s what matters.”

“Well what about the pastor?” the man continued. “Part way through the message he broke down in tears. That didn’t seem very dignified.” The wife chimed in, “Couldn’t you feel the passion resonating from his heart. I find his love for the Lord inspiring.”

“Oh well,” the husband grumbled, “at least the service only lasted for an hour, now I can get on with the rest of my week.” She answered, “Don’t you think spending time in God’s presence, with His people, should be the highlight of the week?”

Our passage encourages us to worship God with all our heart. Don’t let this become a ritual, in your life, going through the motions each week. Passionately praise God, allowing yourself to get lost in awe and wonder when you consider who He is and the things He has done. Whatever distractions take your eyes from Him, clear them away, so you will be able to offer your exclusive adoration. In order to worship God with all our hearts, we must first allow the Lord to give us a new heart. That happens when we receive Christ as our Savior. He takes our heart of stone, and replaces with a heart that beats for God. The NT tells us that “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)