

Mornings for God's Glory

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[0 : 00] So, I'd like to begin this morning with a brief review of at least the primary points we've covered so far in this series. I have a list of seven.

We'll see whether they match up with your notes. First, we need a God-centered perspective on all of life.

The foundation of understanding any aspect of life begins with knowing that God is a God is our creator and sustainer. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon implores us to remember our creator. All of life begins with God, so if we are to understand anything of life, we need to recognize that he is our creator. He is the master designer of our lives.

Second, we need an eternal perspective. This is also an important theme of Ecclesiastes. Frankly, it's an important theme throughout all of the Bible.

[1 : 03] We need to recognize that life is not limited to our short lifespans here on this earth. There is an eternity to come. And more to the point, God's plan for us and all that we do encompass the whole of eternity.

While we're prone to think about the day ahead or the week ahead or maybe the next few years or maybe even the next few decades, God considers everything all at once.

His plan and his purpose reaches across eternity. Third, there is purpose in the mundane. Our daily activities, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, are infused with divine purpose.

We are stewarding what God has given us. We are doing what he has designed us to do. So the small things may seem small, but there's a divine purpose behind them.

Fourth, Christ dignified the ordinary. Most of Jesus' life on this earth was spent not performing miracles, not doing the extraordinary things we typically think about when we think about his life.

[2 : 25] He was born like the rest of us. He grew up and he learned like the rest of us. He worked for a living like the rest of us. He had household chores and responsibilities like the rest of us.

This is the kind of ordinary life he led until he was approximately 30 years old and began his public ministry. So God in the flesh embraced the ordinary.

Fifth, theology is immensely practical. I don't know that I've made this point in quite this way, but it stands to reason that if theology is the study of God and if all that we do should reflect God, we are, after all, created in his image, we are his image bearers, then everything we learn about God becomes practical.

We'll see this more and more as we go along. Sixth, we should avoid that sacred-secular distinction.

Our habit is to think of some parts of life as sacred. Going to church, say, reading the Bible, praying, evangelizing, and so on.

[3 : 43] Then everything else that isn't distinctly spiritual we throw into the secular category. But we don't really see the Bible make that distinction, do we?

In fact, the book of Ecclesiastes is largely one long argument against making that kind of distinction. I was talking with someone last week about this.

When I was growing up in the church, it felt as though the church had two classes of people, at least this is the way I perceived it at the time. You had those with a spiritual calling, those with spiritual gifts, and then you had everyone else.

Those with a calling and those with the gifts were pretty much only the pastors. It was hard to point to somebody else that might have the same. It was a bit like the view of the church prior to the Reformation.

You know, kings might have a divine calling, priests have a divine calling, but most people, most people don't. And that's really one of the lesser known, lesser recognized blessings that came out

of the Reformation.

[4 : 48] The reformer said, no, all Christians have a divine calling. All Christians have spiritual gifts. If you're a mother, that is your God-given vocation, or at least one of them, that is your calling.

If you're a factory worker, that is your calling. And whatever your vocation, whatever God has called you into, wherever he has placed you, do it all to the glory of God.

All to the glory of God. Martin Luther once said, monastic vows rest on the false assumption that there is a special calling, a vocation, to which superior Christians are invited to observe the counsels of perfection, while ordinary Christians fulfill only the commands.

But there simply is no special religious vocation since the call of God comes to each at the common tasks. And he went on to say, and I think this captures what he was getting at, God is milking the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid.

So, we need to set aside this distinction between the sacred and the secular. Everything is sacred because God designed us for it, and he calls us into it.

[6 : 06] And again, Christ himself lived in the ordinary. He obeyed God, and he maintained perfect righteousness through the ordinary.

There is no distinctly secular space in this life. Well, last but not least, there is joy, and there is satisfaction to be found even in the mundane aspects of life.

And if we understand the first six points, it makes sense that God would provide joy and satisfaction in these things. Now, with that, I have one more principle to share before we really get into the nitty-gritty of life, and we'll get into some of that this morning.

So, I've talked about the meaning of life, but I want to better clarify our purpose in life. You might say, I've talked about what God made us for, reflecting his image, being good stewards of his creation, for example.

But I want to pull back and consider our ultimate purpose. What has God ultimately made us for? And this is a key component to how we should view everything in life.

[7 : 25] So, I mentioned before that I've read my fair share of productivity books. And while they all offer different insights and advice, the vast majority of them are built upon what I think is a faulty premise.

They all assume that the reason we should want to be more productive is to benefit us. In other words, self is at the center of our motivation for wanting to be more productive, or whatever the book is trying to get us to accomplish.

But that's not what the Bible teaches. That's not what God made us for. God did not make us to be self-serving creatures. He did not create us for ourselves.

Now, that leads us to ask a fairly profound question. If God did not make us for us, does that mean he made us for him? And why would God need to make us for himself?

I mean, would that imply that God was dissatisfied or deficient in some way? Did he need to create us to fill some sort of void in his existence? Well, that can't be.

[8 : 42] Paul said in Acts 17, he is not served by human hands as though he needed anything. God himself told Moses in Exodus 3, I am who I am.

And I like the way John Piper paraphrases that. He says, I am. That's my name. I am.

I depend on nothing. Nobody to be who I am. I am absolute reality. I had no beginning. I will have no ending. And in relation to creation, I am not becoming what I am.

You see, some would take the view that God could not fully be God without creation.

In other words, he created us to become the God we know in his fullness. But again, that's not what the Bible teaches. Everything we read about God in Scripture points to his self-sufficiency.

[9 : 45] He does not need us to become a more complete version of himself. And we do not change who he is. I am who I am.

Period. He was I am before creation. He is I am as we speak. And he will always be I am.

He is the same yesterday and today and forever. Right? So God had nothing to gain by creating us. So why did he create us? What did he create us for?

Well, here's what he says himself in Isaiah 43, verses 6 and 7. I will say to the north, give up.

And to the south, do not withhold. Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth. Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

[10 : 50] You see, God has a distinct purpose for creating us. It wasn't an act of whimsy. He didn't create us because he was incomplete without us.

And he didn't create us to serve ourselves. He created us, and this comes from his own lips, he created us for his glory.

Now, we don't want to misunderstand this, though, as though God craves glory in the way that we might crave glory, in the way we might crave, say, admiration or respect from other people. For starters, we're not God. We do not inherently possess God's infinite beauty, his infinite worthiness.

And that's really what it comes down to. He is infinitely worthy of our glory. Or glory, I should say. The Apostle John says, God is love.

[11 : 52] He is the definition of love. He is the embodiment of love. And his love is so vast, so great, that he did not want to contain it within himself or within the three persons of the Trinity.

So he created the universe, and human beings in particular, as a means to extend his love, to share it. And this act of creation is very much an act of love because by creating us, God gives us the greatest gift of all.

He created us to enjoy himself. He created us to enjoy himself, to enjoy his glory.

And what is his glory? Well, it's the consummate beauty of the totality of who he is, of his perfections. Here's what John MacArthur writes in his book, *Worship, the Ultimate Priority*.

God is the only being in all of existence who can be said to possess inherent glory. We don't give it to him. It is his by virtue of who he is.

[13 : 05] If no one ever gave God any praise, he would still be the glorious God that he is because he was glorious before any beings were created to worship him. His glory is his being, simply the sum of what he is, regardless of what we do or do not do in recognition of it.

Pastor Sam Storms writes, *What is glory?* Glory is the beauty of God unveiled. Glory is the resplendent radiance of his power and his personality.

Glory is all of God that makes God, God, and shows him to be worthy of our praise and our boasting and our trust and our hope and our confidence and our joy.

Glory is the external elegance of the internal excellencies of God. Glory is what you see and experience and feel when God goes public with his beauty.

One more from John Piper. He says, *The glory of God is the beauty and excellence of his manifold perfections. It is an attempt to put into words what God is like in his magnificence and purity.*

[14 : 21] It refers to his infinite and overflowing fullness of all that is good. The term might focus on his different attributes from time to time, like his power and wisdom and mercy and justice, because each one is indeed awesome and beautiful in its magnitude and quality.

But in general, God's glory is the perfect harmony of all his attributes into one infinitely beautiful and personal being.

So clearly, when the Bible says God created us for his glory, it does not mean he created us to add to or somehow complete his glory.

He was already glorious. And by definition, he cannot become more glorious. So what does the Bible mean when it says we were created for his glory?

Well, he lovingly created us to experience his glory. God is so wonderful, so beautiful, so incredible, that he lovingly said within himself, *I want to create a people to enjoy my glory with me.*

[15 : 34] Now, I've tried to think of illustrations for this, but unsurprisingly, they always seem to fall short. So the best way I can think to illustrate this is to say, imagine you've just tasted the most delicious, I don't know, cheesecake you've ever tasted.

It's like heaven on your tongue. Now, what's the first thing people are prone to do in that situation?

Well, they typically turn to someone else and say, hey, you've got to taste this.

Well, in creation, God essentially says of his own glory, someone has got to taste this. What does Psalm 34 say?

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. So God created us to enjoy him. We exist to see his beauty.

We exist to savor his goodness. And that's why the book of Ecclesiastes ends the way it does. The narrator says, the end of the matter, all has been heard.

[16 : 43] Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. He essentially says, remember your creator. Recognize him for who he is.

Stand in awe of his glory. And he doesn't tell us to keep God's commandments as though we're following the arbitrary rules of some malevolent dictator.

No, our creator has graciously given us the manual for enjoying him, the very thing we were created for. So we have verses like 1 Corinthians 10:31, which I've quoted a few times in this series already. That's where Paul writes, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. And we might think about that exhortation in a couple of different ways.

First, we might think of Paul as saying, okay, we're made in the image of God, so whatever we do, we should reflect God as we do it.

[17:46] And that's true. Second, we might think of Paul as saying, we exist to enjoy God. So strive to enjoy him in everything you do.

And either way we look at it, there are two necessary components. One, we must see God for who he is in all his glory. And number two, we must do what he commands as a means to enjoy his glory.

You know, fear God and keep his commands. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And the second question is, what rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? Answer, the word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

And as John Piper likes to point out, there's really no difference between glorifying him and enjoying him. In fact, I'll quote Piper once more. He says, we exist to bring our lives into alignment with the purpose of God in creation, namely, his purpose to communicate his glory in the overflow of his God-exalting, soul-satisfying love.

[19:19] And what that alignment looks like is this, our magnifying God's glory by finding him to be the most satisfying reality in the universe.

So, if I were writing a book on productivity, I think that's where I would begin. And frankly, all seven of those points that I gave you at the start of the lesson, things we've covered in previous weeks, are really bound up in this one principle.

We exist to glorify and enjoy God. A God-centered perspective, an eternal perspective, purpose in the mundane, Christ-dignifying the ordinary, the practicality of theology, avoiding that sacred, secular distinction, finding joy and satisfaction in the mundane.

It's all wrapped up in this. We exist to glorify God. We exist to know him. We exist to see and to taste his beauty and his goodness.

We exist to enjoy him. So, with that in mind, let's move into the nitty-gritty. And what better area of life to make application of these things, namely doing all to the glory of God, than our morning routines?

[20:49] Let's start at the beginning and talk about how we spend our mornings. Why? Well, what we do first thing in the morning will often set the tone and pace for the entire day.

And we'll only get through a portion of this this morning. Now, I don't know about you, but mornings can be a bit of a struggle for me.

I'm not a natural early riser. My body seems to have an internal clock that says you will not fall asleep before 11 at night, and you will not wake easily before 7 in the morning.

So, when my alarm goes off every day at 6, I'm not prone to crawl out of bed with a sunny disposition and a skip in my step.

You know what I mean? It could take me an hour or so to really come alive and get my bearings. Well, this creates a bit of a problem because, number one, I'm not necessarily thinking clearly first thing in the morning, and number two, I'm not necessarily moving about and doing what I'm doing with any kind of intentionality.

[21:58] And those are two things that the Christian must have. Clarity of mind and intentionality. Let me show you. First, we need clear minds.

This is true in the morning. This is true for all of the Christian life. 1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

2 Timothy 4:5 Always be sober-minded. Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Philippians 4.8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

[23 : 31] In 2 Corinthians 10.5, Paul tells us to take every thought captive to obey Christ. In Ephesians 4.23, he speaks of being renewed in the spirit of our minds.

In Colossians 3.2, he tells us to set our minds on things that are above. And perhaps most fitting, 1 Thessalonians 5.6 says, So then, let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. I know we like to talk about the Christian faith as a religion of the heart, and it is, but it's just as much a religion of the mind. What did Jesus say?

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. There's a reason we have so many passages that encourage us to be sober-minded.

We need clear minds. We need focused minds. And that leads us to the second thing every Christian must have, which is intentionality.

[24 : 47] Clear minds are important because sinners do not naturally gravitate toward what is good and right. We naturally move in the other direction.

We move away from what's right. We move away from truth. We move away from God. So if our minds are not sharp and focused, well, it's kind of like someone glancing at their phone while they're driving a car.

If they're not focused on the road ahead, if their mind is not set on the thing that it ought to be set on, the car will drift. And terrible things can happen as a result.

So we need clear heads because the Christian life requires intentionality. I mean, think about Paul's struggle that he relates in Romans 7. The same man who constantly implored the church to be sober-minded admits, I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see members waging war against the law of my mind.

In other words, he knew what was right, and was very intentional about doing what was right, and yet he still found it difficult to avoid sin at all times.

[26 : 01] So what chance does a person have who moves through life without much intentionality at all? Well, he or she becomes an easy target for the evil one.

A few years ago, I wrote a little something and published that I titled Unplugging the Television. And in it, I talked about being at a friend's house when I was a kid, and I don't know why this memory has always stuck with me, but my friend's dad was watching TV in the next room.

A good Christian man. And every five or ten minutes, I would hear him let out this sound of disgust. Ugh! Why did they have to put this in the show?

You know, this would be a perfectly good show if it didn't have all of this language. And on and on it went. And after a while, I remember thinking to myself, if he's so bothered by what he's seen, by what he's hearing, why doesn't he just turn it off?

And here's, in that piece, what I went on to write. Perhaps unplugging our TVs altogether is an extreme measure. It is, but following Christ is all about extremes.

[27 : 14] If anyone wants to follow after me, Jesus taught, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. I'm not suggesting we subject ourselves to the horrors of crucifixion here.

Forgoing the silly pleasures of television is hardly a great sacrifice. If you insist on keeping your TV, we can, at the very least, use wise discernment regarding what we watch and be mindful of how much time we give it.

Jesus also told his disciples, if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. I'm partial to this approach. I'd rather lose a troublesome eye than attempt to blink every time something comes along I shouldn't see.

And I just use this example of watching TV because it's something that we often do, and I think we can relate to this, this is something we often do without any intentionality at all.

You know, we may not have anything specific we want to watch. We may not even intend to sit down and watch the TV exclusively.

[28 : 20] We just turn it on to whatever we can find, sometimes when we're multitasking, sometimes when we're doing other things. Then like my friend's dad, we find ourselves letting in all kinds of filth and immorality.

It streams right into our homes, not to mention our minds, and this all happens because we weren't intentional when we turned the TV on, and we weren't intentional when we chose what to watch,

and we weren't intentional about turning it off when maybe we should have.

TV is just one of those things that we often use without purpose or forethought. Same is true for our phones and computers now. A lack of intentionality can quickly get us into trouble, and this is very relevant to how we spend our mornings.

If your schedule is anything like mine, you probably have limited time in the morning to get ready, to get out the door. I also have young children, so that adds its own challenges.

It's no longer just about me. I have to make sure the kids are eating breakfast and getting dressed and brushing teeth and so on. And sometimes it feels like I am moving through the house on autopilot.

[29 : 35] And I would argue that is never a good state for a Christian to be in. So think back to all of those principles I listed at the start. We need a God-centered perspective.

We need an eternal perspective. We need to treat our routines as sacred rather than merely secular. Ultimately, our purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy Him in all we do.

And again, this is especially important that we strive to do this to fulfill this purpose first thing in the morning because it will likely set the tone for the rest of the day.

And this probably will not happen without clarity of mind and without intentionality behind it. Now, a couple of weeks ago, I looked up every reference I could find to mornings in the Bible.

and there are hundreds of them. So obviously, we don't have time to look at them all. Most of them would not be especially relevant anyway, but I do want to highlight a few that give us a sense of direction on how we should think about mornings.

[30 : 50] Right? And let's start with Psalm 5-3. This is the Psalm of David. And I'll read, I'll actually read the first three verses. David says in Psalm 5, Give ear to my words, O Lord.

Consider my groaning. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God. For to you do I pray. O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice.

In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch. This proves to be something of a pattern in David's life and he's certainly not the only one.

But David's first priority, first thing in the morning, is to turn his heart, to turn his mind and to turn his voice to God in prayer.

To paraphrase, he says, Listen Lord, I pray to you, hear me in the morning. And not only does David pray first thing, but he also says, In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you.

[32 : 01] He begins his day in communion with God and he begins his day seeking to serve God.

Now, if we're honest with ourselves, this might be a far cry from how we prioritize things first thing in the morning.

What are we thinking about when we roll out of bed? Is the coffee made? Oh, I need a shower. Are the kids dressed? What time is it? I've got to get to work. Perhaps we've got a number of things running through our head, things that we have to get accomplished later in the day.

But I can't think of a better way to start the day than to pause long enough to have real communion with God.

If we start the day with no thought of God, if we fail to remember that we were created for His glory, then the rest of the day may very well reflect that same oversight.

We may struggle with temptation. We may handle challenges poorly. We may slip into patterns of impatience or ingratitude.

[33 : 14] If, on the other hand, we begin with clear and intentional focus on God, we stand on more solid ground as we face whatever the day brings.

David saw morning as a fitting time to present himself before God, to realign his heart, if you will, to wait expectantly on the Lord's will.

people. In Psalm 90, Moses prays, this is verse 14, satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Notice his logic. By orienting ourselves to God's steadfast love at the start of the day, we set the right tone, we set a joyful tone for everything that follows.

Of course, Christ himself often rose very early in the morning to pray. And the text might actually have us believe that he didn't pray because he rose early, but rather that he rose early so that he could pray before the hustle and the bustle of the day began.

[34 : 33] Mark 135, and rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Our Savior, who perfectly glorified the Father, shows us the importance of intentional, prioritized communion with God.

First thing in the morning. And if Jesus, who is God in the flesh, found it valuable to seek God's face early, then I think we should seriously consider doing the same.

Now, this doesn't mean that we all need to become morning people who leap out of bed at 4 a.m. I don't know that I'll ever be that person. But, it does mean that we should strive to ensure that whenever we rise, whatever time it is, we start the day with purpose.

God-centered, God-glorifying purpose. So, instead of moving mindlessly through our routines, and well before we check emails, or start scrolling through social media, or even turning on the news, I suggest we start with prayer.

[35 : 55] Even if it's only brief, we can pick up the Bible, and let God's word orient us for the day. We'll talk more about that probably next time. This approach could change everything that follows.

Rather than viewing a shower, or brushing our teeth as, you know, perfunctory chores, we can use that time even, to consider God's provision, to consider His kindness.

And if that sounds silly, or maybe even trivial, think about it like this. God created, and He still sustains the world, including that water that cleans us.

He gave us bodies that function, and He created the materials and the processes that allow us to care for those bodies. He provided our homes, our electricity, our warm showers, and everything else that we likely take for granted in the morning.

By remembering Him, and by communing with Him in those moments, as we're going through those routines, we acknowledge that He is the one who provides what we need.

[37 : 04] We stop taking His gifts for granted, and start receiving them as tokens of His goodness. Maybe you woke up late, and you don't have time to physically stop and pray.

Well, you can pray as you're moving through the house even. Lord, I thank You for this water. I thank You for sustaining me through the night. Help me to serve You today.

As Paul says in 1 Timothy 6.17, we can thank Him because He richly provides us with everything to enjoy. But I think with some intentionality, I think with some careful planning, we can make time to pray.

Better yet, I think we should make time to pray. Listen to this prayer from Douglas McKelvey. He titles it, A Liturgy for the Ritual of Morning Coffee.

He writes, Meet me, O Christ, in the stillness of morning. Move me, O Spirit, to quiet my heart.

[38 : 15] Mend me, O Father, from yesterday's harms. From the discords of yesterday, resurrect my peace. From the discouragements of yesterday, resurrect my hope.

From the weariness of yesterday, resurrect my strength. From the doubts of yesterday, resurrect my faith. From the wounds of yesterday, resurrect my love.

Let me enter this new day aware of my need and awake to your grace, O Lord. Lord. Amen. Now, I love this prayer for a couple of reasons.

First, it acknowledges our need for God right away. This is not an afterthought. This is not a prayer offered in the middle of the afternoon.

This is a petition to God soon after getting out of bed. God. Like David, it recognizes our utter dependence upon God to fulfill our purpose.

[39 : 21] So it seeks Him first thing in the morning. And second, it acknowledges something about mornings that is a very common theme throughout the Bible.

And we'll explore this further as we go along. Mornings are a fresh start. That's how they're often represented in Scripture. their fresh start.

No matter what happened the day before, this day is a new day. It's a different day. Now, we'll have to continue this next time.

But let me leave you with perhaps my favorite verse regarding mornings. This is Lamentations chapter 3 starting at verse 22.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. And they are new every morning.

[40 : 21] Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in Him. Every morning.

His mercies are new every morning. Let's pray. Father, your mercies are new every morning. And we bless your name for your steadfast love that never ceases.

Help us remember that we were created to glorify and to enjoy you. Give us clarity of mind and intentional hearts as we rise each day so that we may honor and serve you in every task. Guide us to begin our mornings with prayer and thanksgiving, trusting in your faithfulness and ultimately finding our joy in you and in you alone. And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We're dismissed.