

Communing with God in the Morning

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[0 : 00] 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.

And I attempted to explain that being created for God's glory means a couple of things. First, it means we were created to reflect Him.

We see this very explicitly in the creation story in Genesis 1. We're told God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created them.

We might say that God built into us much of Himself, many of His characteristics. But even more than that, He created us to intentionally, willfully reflect Him by doing good, by doing what is right, by doing His will.

In other words, we might say we were created to act like Him. We were made like Him, but we were also made to act like Him. So in these ways, we glorify God by reflecting Him or imaging Him.

[1 : 08] Second, being created for God's glory also means He created us to share in His glory. We were created to experience His glory.

And we see a little something of that in Genesis as well. Clearly, God gave Adam and Eve everything they could ever need or want, but even more than that, He gave them Himself.

Adam and Eve enjoyed unbroken fellowship with their Creator. They could walk with Him. They could talk with Him. And that's what makes Genesis 3, when we come to that point in the story, so unsettling.

You remember this. They sinned against God. Then we're told they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.

If they had not sinned, if this had been any other day before it, they could have run to God when they heard His voice.

[2 : 11] They could have entered into sweet communion with Him. But because of their sin, that opportunity was ruined. And of course, as we move through the rest of Scripture, what do we see?

We see a people desperate to be reconciled to God once again. We see a people trying to be reconciled and failing until Christ comes.

Paul writes, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

What is the great advantage of being saved? Namely, it's that we are reconciled to God. We can once again enter into genuine fellowship with Him.

And one day we will live in His presence, just as Adam and Eve were able to do in the garden before their sin. You see, when we're told God created us for His glory, we tend to think of that in terms of praise.

[3 : 19] In other words, we think that He created us to praise Him, to worship, and that is certainly true. He's more than worthy of our worship, but it goes beyond that. When Scripture says He created us for His glory, He created us to know His glory, to experience His glory, to enjoy His glory.

I gave the example last time of someone biting into delicious cheesecake and turning to the person next to them and saying, You've got to try this.

Well, before creation, the Lord says within Himself, within the Godhead, I am so good, my glory is so great, someone has to experience this. And He created Adam.

He lovingly created Adam to have the privilege of knowing Him and enjoying Him. So as we think about any aspect of life, we should always be asking ourselves, first of all, how do I reflect God in what I'm doing?

And second, we should ask, how can I enjoy God in what I'm doing? That's really what it means to glorify God. We stand in awe of Him.

[4 : 33] We worship Him. We obey Him. We depend on Him. And we seek to enjoy Him primarily through communion with Him.

And as I said last time, what better place to begin than our morning routines? Paul said, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Well, that certainly includes our mornings and how we spend them.

But mornings are significant, if for no other reason, because they set the tone and pace for the rest of the day. Now, I will get into some very practical guidance.

But before we get there, I want to give you an even better sense of how the Bible presents mornings. In other words, what does the Bible say about mornings?

What's a biblical worldview or understanding of mornings? Well, go with me, if you will, to Lamentations chapter 3.

[5 : 36] Lamentations chapter 3. Now, to give you some context, Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah in the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction.

He had previously warned the people that God's judgment was coming if they continued in their sin and in their rebellion against Him. But sadly, they didn't listen.

So after Babylon invaded the city, leaving it in ruins, Jeremiah is left surveying the devastation. And he sees suffering everywhere he looks.

There's hunger in the streets. The temple has been destroyed. I mean, this had been once the center of God's worship by His covenant people, the place where God's very presence dwelled, and now it was gone.

And here's what Jeremiah writes in verses 22 through 24. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end.

[6 : 45] They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in Him. Now, as we read the entire book, we see that this is a man crying out in pain and grief, but not right here.

Here we see Jeremiah's hope. We see his faith. We see his trust in God despite everything. He knows that despite the circumstances, God's character remains unchanging.

So, for Jeremiah, in this moment, he's not relying on what he feels as much as what he knows. He feels devastated, but he knows God is faithful.

He says, The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. That term, steadfast love, is often associated throughout the Old Testament with God's faithfulness to keep his covenant.

He says, It's a loyal, dedicated love that never changes. You see, Jeremiah knows that even as everything around him collapses, God will keep his word.

[8 : 04] He will keep his promises. He will be faithful to the covenants. He's made with his people. God's mercies never come to an end, Jeremiah says.

Now, this is an essential point for our study. Jeremiah doesn't believe God grants mercy only here and there. He doesn't think of God's mercy as a well that might run dry at times.

No, he believes God has a never-ending supply of mercy. He believes God graciously renews his mercy every single day.

In other words, Jeremiah doesn't have to cling to the blessings God offered yesterday or the day before. He doesn't have to worry that God's mercy might have run out today.

God has an abundant supply of mercy for today and for tomorrow and for the day after that, for the next year, and the year after that, and the year after that.

[9 : 11] It reminds me of Exodus 16 when the Israelites were wandering through the wilderness. They became very fearful that they would starve to death out there. They had no food.

In fact, they became so anxious that they began complaining to Moses, claiming they would have been better off had they remained in slavery in Egypt. And what did God do?

He said, Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day. Every day.

Now, that's significant in the story because the Israelites learned that they could not collect more of that bread than they needed for that day.

If they got anxious, if they got nervous that they might run out or that God may not supply bread for the next day, they would try to collect more than a day's worth.

[10 : 11] And what would happen? It would spoil. They couldn't hold on to it. It would be useless the next day. Of course, God was teaching them to depend on Him and Him alone for what they needed.

And this was a dependence they needed to renew within themselves every single morning. Every morning they had to remind themselves, I will rely on the Lord today for what I need.

And I will rely on the Lord tomorrow for what I need. I will trust Him to give me my daily provision. And that's what Jeremiah says.

His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. The sunrise itself is a reminder that God still loves His people.

When we take our first waking breath, we're reminded that God is still showing mercy because it is God who gives to all mankind life and breath and everything, right?

[11 : 15] And this is actually a consistent theme throughout the Bible. It's a little subtle if you're not looking for it, but the Bible often frames mornings as a new beginning. Think back to the creation story in Genesis.

There was evening and there was morning the first day. And that refrain gets repeated over and over. Each day marking a new creation by God.

We see this very orderly, very intentional pattern designed by God Himself. And He uses each new day to create something new, to create something wonderful and good.

Well, in a slightly different sense, that pattern continues to this day. God's mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. There is night.

There is day. There is rest. Then there is renewal. Morning begins a brand new day with fresh mercies. We leave behind the darkness of night, which, as you know, is often used throughout Scripture as a metaphor for sin and sorrow and such.

[12 : 25] Then the light shines, overcoming the darkness. And that's why we see the pattern I mentioned last time of God's people seeking Him first thing in the morning.

In Psalm 5, David writes, O Lord, in the morning You hear my voice. In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for You and watch. In Psalm 59, verse 16, He says, I will sing of Your strength.

I will sing aloud of Your steadfast love in the morning. Why the morning? Well, we could point to several reasons. God's mercies are new each morning.

By seeking and serving and praising the Lord in the morning, we're acknowledging His steadfast love has continued through the night and into a new day.

As I said before, it's a great way to set the tone for the day. It sets us on sure footing first thing in the morning. It's a way of offering our first fruits to God.

[13 : 30] Again, we don't have explicit commands that say, you must do this as soon as you get out of bed, but all of the principles are there.

And it becomes pretty clear that seeking communion with God should be our priority, which means it should be our priority first thing in the morning. Now, don't forget the context of what Jeremiah says here.

Things are not going great for him. Things are not going great for God's people. But God's love remains unchanging. No matter what happened the day before or what he anticipates for the day ahead, Jeremiah clings to this truth that God is certainly with him and that God has an unending supply of mercy.

The prophet sees a sense of renewal every morning. So in turn, he reminds himself of God's promises. I've always loved the psalm that says, why are you cast down, O my soul?

And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God. God. The psalmist is speaking to himself, reminding himself of the promises of God.

[14 : 56] Again, it's not wise to rely on how we feel at any given moment. I confess before that I don't often wake up with a skip in my step.

I'm not always thrilled about getting up early in the morning or thinking about my workload for the day and that sort of thing, but we don't rely on feelings. Instead, we rely on what we know.

And we know God has promised to never, ever leave us or forsake us. We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. And Jeremiah is reciting these promises to himself.

Great is your faithfulness, he says. Things may appear dismal now, but you are a good God who remains loyal to His promises. So I'm clinging to that.

I'll let that carry me through the day. Now, when it comes to the practical steps we might take in the morning, I think it would be helpful to acknowledge what we're trying to achieve, because this is not about completing a checklist.

[16 : 02] This is not about fulfilling a mere duty. Our aim is to glorify God by, number one, reflecting Him, and number two, striving to enjoy Him.

And what better way to accomplish these things than by entering into communion with Him? We need to speak to God, and we need to hear from God. So we need to develop a morning routine that facilitates this.

So it won't come as a surprise to hear me say that we need to pray, and we need to read our Bibles. In prayer, we speak to God, and in reading our Bibles, God speaks to us.

But let's back up for a minute, because there's an often overlooked aspect to morning routines, namely ensuring that we get enough rest the night before, that we get enough sleep.

Obviously, it's much harder to get up with the kind of clarity and the kind of intentionality we need when we're tired because we didn't get enough sleep the night before. And I will spend more time on this subject in the future, but Psalm 127 says, It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for He gives to His beloved sleep.

[17 : 28] In other words, God has given us sleep. He has designed us to need rest. It's a very vain and foolish thing to sacrifice sleep for other things, less important things.

Proper sleep is not a luxury. It's not wise. It's not biblical to say things like, Well, I'll sleep when I'm dead. No, God Himself gave us an example of rest when He rested on the seventh day of creation, right?

Sleep is not a luxury. It is stewarding the body God has given you. So that's where our morning routines really begin. They begin at bedtime.

We need to get to bed early enough to wake up refreshed and ready to start the day in a God-honoring way. And this is especially important for those of us who have a schedule to keep.

If we have to be at work by a certain time, perhaps we need to figure out how to make more time in the morning for communion with God, which means we may have to adjust when we go to bed.

[18 : 36] We may have to be more intentional about how we plan our evenings. Now, let's be honest with ourselves. Assuming we don't already have some of these spiritual disciplines built into our morning routines, they are not going to happen by accident.

We have to be intentional. It helps to plan for it. For instance, if you're someone who needs, let's say, eight hours of sleep, and you decide that you need a solid 30 minutes for prayer and Bible reading in the morning, which I think is a very fair estimate, then do the math.

It's pretty simple. It takes you X number of minutes to get ready for the day, to eat breakfast, and so on. And you have to ask yourself, what time do I need to go to bed to get eight hours of sleep and have an extra 30 minutes in the morning to commune with God?

Then you set your bedtime accordingly. Now, I realize that some of you are retired, so you may think to yourself, I don't need to worry about this.

I don't need to be out the door at a specific time. Well, I would argue, and I've heard some of you say this, you may need to be even more intentional than the rest of us, those of us who work, because you may wake up thinking, I've got all the time in the world.

[20 : 02] I'm in no hurry. I can pray whenever I want. I can read the Bible whenever I want. I don't need a set schedule. Proverbs 21.5 says, The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.

Think back to what I said about our lack of intentionality. The Bible has quite a bit to say about careful planning, about diligence, if you will.

If we don't make intentional plans, we're prone to not do them. I know for me there have been times when I've made a resolution to do something, but I didn't actually schedule it.

It was more like wishful thinking. You know, I will read 30 minutes every morning, okay? When? Before I take a shower?

After I take a shower? Before I eat breakfast? After I eat breakfast? Will I put it on the schedule at a specific time? And I have found that when I don't schedule it, I don't get it done.

[21 : 15] You know, our trash goes out every Monday morning. And for a long time I told myself that I would take the trash out at some point on Sunday. And you know what often happened?

Monday morning I'm backing out of the driveway and I realize, oh, I forgot the trash. So I get out, I drag the trash to the road. But then I decided to set a reminder on my phone, 8 o'clock, every Sunday evening, take out the trash.

And since then, I haven't forgotten to take out the trash on Sunday. That simple. The point is, it helps to have a plan. Whether you're retired, whether you work, whether you're a stay-at-home mom, it helps to have a plan.

Go to bed at the right time. Schedule your morning appropriately. Have your supplies ready the night before. For me, I have a specific chair I sit in every morning to pray and read.

My alarm goes off at 6. I know I have about 30 minutes to get dressed and ready and maybe make a cup of coffee. So by 6.30, I move to my chair where I'll find my Bible and my devotional book and anything else that I happen to need.

[22 : 30] Then I know, excuse me, I have 30 minutes to pray. I have 30 minutes to read before I need to get up and out the door. And I go through pretty much the same routine on the weekends.

And this structure has helped me to remain very consistent. Now, I do want to make something very clear. As you hear me make suggestions and talk about maybe my own routines, I'm not suggesting for a moment that you must do it precisely this way.

This is not some rigid, legalistic formula you must follow. We all have different schedules. We have different responsibilities. We may have different routines that work for us.

Maybe you prefer to commune with God before you even get out of bed. I've known people that do that. They just grab their Bible off the nightstand and they get started. That may work for you. There is no one-size-fits-all formula.

We're not creating a legalistic checklist here. We are striving to glorify God by giving Him the first part of our day. And what works best for me may not work best for you and vice versa.

[23 : 39] I've known people who do their morning devotionals at home. I've known people who don't like to do their morning devotionals at home. They quickly rush out the door.

They prefer to take a walk or sit at the park or go to a coffee shop. I've known mothers who like to get up before their kids were up so they weren't distracted.

And I've known other mothers who were perfectly fine praying and reading with kids crawling all over them. When I was still living in North Carolina, I didn't have set office hours, so I enjoyed driving two miles down the road.

There was a little coffee shop there, and they had a somewhat private deck in the back. And I loved sitting out there to pray and read as early in the morning as I could.

Well, today I have a set schedule, so I've had to adjust. And that's probably a good thing for us to keep in mind. Life will change on us, so while it's good to make a plan, that plan may have to change over time.

[24 : 42] Well, as I said, our aim is to enter into communion with God. So what exactly do we do? Well, again, this is going to happen by speaking to God, prayer, and allowing Him to speak to us, reading the Bible.

But I think we can break that down even further. Let's start with prayer. Why do we pray in the morning? Well, we pray to thank God.

Give thanks in all circumstances, Paul said. 1 Thessalonians 5.18 We pray in worship and adoration of God.

Psalms 29 says, Ascribed to the Lord the glory due His name. We pray as a way of drawing near to God. Hebrews 4.16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace.

We pray to align our will with God's will. Jesus prayed, Not my will, but yours be done. We pray that we might be able to resist temptations.

[26 : 03] Jesus told His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. We pray that we might have wisdom.

James writes, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God and it will be given Him. We pray to show our dependence upon God and upon His sovereignty.

Think of Proverbs 16.9, The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes His steps. Now, I'm sure you can see how all of these prayers would be beneficial at the start of our day.

These prayers are appropriate anytime of course, but they seem especially fitting for the start of a day. We start the day with a spirit of thanksgiving.

We should start the day by glorifying God through praise and adoration. We should start the day by asking God to help us overcome the temptations we will inevitably face throughout the day.

[27 : 10] We start the day by seeking His will, which of course is always better than our will. We should start the day by asking Him for wisdom. We'll certainly need it as the day progresses.

And we start the day by acknowledging God's sovereignty and expressing our trust in His providence. I've always loved what John Bunyan once said about prayer.

He said, you can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed. Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan.

Let me read that first line again. You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.

In other words, everything we attempt to do throughout the day will be that much harder, if not impossible, until we have prayed. And as D.A. Carson wrote, we don't drift into spiritual life.

[28 : 23] We do not drift into disciplined prayer. We do not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray. That means we must set aside time to do nothing but pray.

What we actually do reflects our highest priorities. That means we can proclaim our commitment to prayer until the cows come home, but unless we actually pray, our actions disown our words.

In short, we need intentional, designated time for prayer. And as the examples of Jesus and David and perhaps others show us, not to mention common sense, really, there is probably not a better time for this kind of intentional prayer than first thing in the morning.

As I said last time, we can pray, and we should pray as we're moving around the house and we're doing other things, but we also need designated time for nothing but prayer.

So now, let's talk about hearing from God. That is, reading the Bible. If it helps, it only takes 15 minutes a day to read through the entire Bible in a year.

[29 : 41] That's not very much time. Of course, there's no rule that says you have to read through the entire Bible in a year. I have followed, personally, all kinds of one-year reading plans.

I've followed plans that take me through the entire Bible in 90 days. I have a friend who's partial to reading the same book of the Bible over and over and over again for maybe a month at a time until he feels like he has really absorbed it, and then he moves on to the next book.

You know, take your pick. Do you want to read through the Bible widely or perhaps deeply? Maybe you read more of it this year and less of it, but more deeply next year.

The only thing I would advise against, I guess, is reading only a verse or two in passing. When I was a kid, I remember having one of those daily bread boxes with Bible verses in it.

You remember those? They were printed on small cards, and each card had maybe one verse on it, and the idea was that you could take one of these cards out, read the verse very quickly, and then move on throughout your day, and I think it was supposed to be a verse that you would reflect on, you'd meditate on all day.

[30 : 55] And I won't say there's something wrong with that, but I believe it would be better to go both wider and deeper, especially with our morning reading. Why?

Well, let's consider some of the reasons we read the Bible. We read the Bible because it's profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

We read it because it makes us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, 2 Timothy 3.15. We read it because it sanctifies us by the truth, John 17.17.

We read it because it equips us to resist temptation. Look at Matthew 4.4. We read it because it produces faith through hearing the Word of Christ, Romans 10.

We read it because it reveals the character and the will of God. We read it because it is our source of wisdom and guidance.

[32 : 12] We read it because it brings us comfort. It brings us hope. Look again at what Jeremiah says. Despite the world crumbling all around him, he says, the Lord is my portion, therefore I will hope in him.

God himself is my portion, my inheritance, he says. These are the kinds of truths we are reminded of every time we read the Bible. Lastly, at least on my list, we read the Bible because it equips us for every good work.

What better way to start the day? Now, I have several more pages worth of notes regarding mornings and what the Bible says about them and maybe we'll come back to some of it anyway, but before we run out of time, let me just throw out a list of very practical considerations to help you possibly shape your morning routine and I present them in no particular order.

First of all, I strongly recommend setting aside at least 30 minutes for devotional time in the morning. If we can run through X number of sitcoms in the evening, all lasting, you know, 25, 30 minutes, surely we can commune with God for 30 minutes in the morning.

You'll likely spend half that time in reading. You may spend half that time in prayer. If you need to go to bed 30 minutes earlier, as I said, go to bed 30 minutes earlier.

[33 : 57] Maybe there are things that you typically do in the morning that you could do in the evening before. Second, don't think of your morning devotional time as something to check off a to-do list for the day.

Chances are you will not be studying the Bible, at least not in depth first thing in the morning. Some of you may. But that's still something we desperately need.

You'll want to come back to prayer. You will want to come back to Bible reading and communion with God as often as you can throughout the day. So if you think of it as something I have checked it off, I'm good for the day, I can move on.

That's the wrong spirit, the wrong attitude, the wrong heart toward the entire thing. Third, just remind yourself what a privilege it is to commune with God our Father.

We're not talking about adding some unpleasant chores to your day. We're talking about an opportunity to start your day by enjoying fellowship with our Heavenly Father.

[35 : 09] And furthermore, please consider what this communion has cost. We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

Christ gave His life that we might once again enjoy God. What a privilege. Fourth, I believe I mentioned this already, but make preparation the night before.

Pick a place to pray and read. You might consider using the place every day for reasons I don't have time to explain right now. Put your Bible, put your other materials there, have everything ready the night before.

Fifth, if you're anything like me, concentration is in short supply first thing in the morning. I'm still foggy-brained. My kids can be quite the distraction, so what I have learned to do is do my morning reading on an iPad, and I use an app that will read to me as I follow along with my eyes.

There's something about hearing it and seeing it at the same time that helps me focus. That's not going to work for everyone, but for me, it's been helpful. More broadly, find what works best for you.

[36 : 30] I'm a big fan of multi-volume readers' Bibles. I don't know if you've ever seen one of these. The text is printed on one column. Nice, thick paper. It feels like a waiting novel or something.

All of the verse numbers and cross-references, every distraction on the page is removed, and it's very easy to get immersed in what you're reading. In fact, I've often found myself reading more than I intended for the day because I was using one of those readers' Bibles.

You might consider using a different translation at times. You might try different reading plans. Move to different places in the house. Take a shower before you read. Take a shower after you read.

Experiment until you find a routine that really works for you. Sixth, I strongly recommend you always have a pen and paper nearby.

Have something to write with. Like I said, you'll come back and you'll study later if you don't have time to do that in the morning, so it's helpful to write down any questions you have as you're reading. Write down any notes, that way you can come back to them.

[37 : 37] You'll say to yourself, well, I'll remember this, but if you're anything like me, a few hours later you will not remember. Seventh, if you struggle with focus and distractions in the morning, you might try writing your prayers.

prayers. In the past, I have used the excuse that I will pray, and I mean really pray later in the day when I'm fully awake and I've had some caffeine and so on.

Try writing your prayers. Sit down with pen and paper and write your prayers. Keep a prayer journal, if you will. By the way, I may very well come back to the subject of journaling another time, but I have found writing my prayers.

Keeps me very focused on what I'm praying. Eighth and final, I haven't said much about devotional books and commentaries. Personally, I love using a daily devotional.

I also like at times just using a Bible commentary to go with my Bible reading. And I'll have more to say about reading in general later, but I would simply advise that we never forsake Bible reading for reading other books.

[38 : 54] use them, yes. Use them as you read the Bible, but reading God's Word should be the priority. And I'll leave you with a word from David.

In Psalm 63, verse 1, he writes, O God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you.

My flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. My prayer for us is that our hearts feel the exact same way every morning as soon as we climb out of bed.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank you for the gift of a new day. Thank you for the renewed mercies that greet us each morning.

As we seek to glorify you, I pray that you would guide us to reflect your character, to enjoy your presence in all that we do. Help us to rise each morning with hearts that are eager to commune with you, to trust in your unfailing provision, to walk in faithful obedience to you throughout our day.

[40 : 10] Teach us to number our days wisely and to dedicate each moment to your glory. Strengthen us, Lord, as we strive to live in light of your steadfast love.

Remind us of your great and wonderful promises often. And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We're dismissed.