

Friday: “Fearing” God

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-15 ¹ “Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ² that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long...¹³ It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear...”

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| <p>Reflect: The culture in which we live has seriously impoverished our ability to relate properly to God. E.g., far too often we think of love as an emotion; yet the Bible commands us to love God (e.g., Deut6:5) as well as other people (e.g., Jn13:34-35; Eph5:25). You can’t exactly command an emotion...</p> <p>The Bible also commands us to “fear” God. Quite often when we think of “fear” we think of terror and being afraid. Apparently we need to redefine (or refresh) our understanding of both “love” and “fear”.</p> <p>In the Bible (especially Deuteronomy) “love” and “fear” are practically interchangeable in several places. Our love (loyalty and obedience) of God is fueled by fear (respect, adoration, total dependence). Both are in response to His redemptive acts on our behalf. Redemptive acts that we should never forget...or else we run the risk of forgetting Him as well.</p> | <p>Respond: Are there times when you “feel” more in love with God than others? If so, can you see the benefit of recalling that our love for God isn’t just an emotion?</p> <p>You may have noticed it, but the word “serve” in 6:13 should be familiar. That is why YHWH freed the Hebrews from Egypt. How have you served Him this week?</p> <p>What are five reasons you can think of, based on your past experiences, which give a basis for you to “fear” God?</p> |
| <p>Pray: Thank God that what He desires from us is so clear in His word. Pray for the teachers who will be teaching the children of NLCC on Sunday – ask God to bless their efforts and for them to have a sense of fulfillment as they serve God in this immensely important position. Pray that you never forget YHWH, not in your mind and certainly not in your actions.</p> | |

Saturday: Consequences of not “Hearing”

Read: Joshua 7

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| <p>Reflect: God is such a loving and forgiving God. He is much more apt to bless than curse (e.g., Exod20:4-6; 34:6-7). However, He does have His limits...</p> <p>We’ve spent a week reflecting a bit on God’s uniqueness and unity. We didn’t really touch a lot on what will happen if His people disobey Him, but today’s chapter clearly shows an immediate consequence...</p> <p>Our “Passionate Spirituality” score in the <i>Natural Church Development</i> survey had some relatively high marks. Our “passion for devotions” scored the highest in this category; this indicates the Bible is important for us as we live our daily lives. However, our “spiritual interconnectedness” scored relatively low; this indicates we need to do a better job of getting people involved in the ministry of NLCC. Will you work to be a part of the solution?</p> | <p>Respond: What has been the most beneficial to you in the insert this week?</p> <p>If you were a part of a “unit” that delivered groceries on 7/13, have you made an attempt to get back in touch with those you served?</p> <p>How involved are you at NLCC? Is there an area in which you’d like to serve? Is that area something that NLCC already “does” or would it need to be started?</p> |
| <p>Pray: Ask God to continue to prepare your heart and mind to worship Him tomorrow, not just with your NLCC family at the building, but all day. Thank God for His grace. Pray for our services tomorrow – that they are pleasing to God and that we are welcoming to our guests.</p> | |

Now Hear This...

July 20 – 26

This week our focus from the *Natural Church Development* health assessment is on “Inspiring Worship Services”. We scored relatively well in this area, but as with anything there is room for improvement. Yet how we go about improving is as important as the goal to improve.

We realize worship is so much more than what takes place on Sunday mornings. Nevertheless, Sunday morning is a large part of our “Inspiring Worship Services” score. You can ask yourself the following questions in relation to this category.

- Why do I come to the worship service on Sunday?
- Is the sermon relevant to me?
- Do I leave the building feeling better than when I arrived?
- Do I want to share NLCC’s worship service with my friends?

With those questions in mind I think it’s clear to see that a key to raising the quality of our Inspiring Worship Services is not to copy what another successful congregation does. While we can learn from other congregations, what they do may not work here.

So, how can we raise the quality of our Inspiring Worship Services? Part of it is by realizing what God commands of us. He commands us to “love” and “fear” Him. That sounds odd to our ears doesn’t it? A command to love someone...that doesn’t sound right. According to our culture love is an emotion we stumble upon (e.g., “I fell in love with her...” “It feels like I don’t love him anymore...”), not something we can control. Oh how wrong that is...

As we look at Inspiring Worship Services this week we’ll be looking at “The Shema”. It’s found in Deuteronomy chapter six. It was so important to the faith of the Hebrews that they recited it (at least) twice a day. Hebrew boys would be taught The Shema as soon as they could talk. It was also frequently the last words of a Jewish person at their death. So basically, Jewish people were taught to have the name of God, and His oneness, on their lips from early childhood until their death. That sounds good, but...

Unfortunately, during certain times of Judaism’s history, debates have raged concerning precisely how long after dawn or sunset The Shema should be recited. There were also debates about the proper posture in which a person should recite it. How sad...

It seems to me if a person wanted to recite it an hour after sunrise while on both knees, but another wanted to do it as soon as the sun broke the horizon while standing on their head (not that they did) that God wouldn’t have cared. But maybe that’s just me; perhaps I’m too simple. However, I think God was more concerned that the implications of those words in The Shema were lived out faithfully by those who repeated them.

Bringing it back to our worship services on Sunday mornings...it seems a stretch to say a person can be genuinely encountered by God in a worship service on a weekly basis and not have it impact their lives in visible ways. I believe we’re seeing more and more evidence of those Sunday morning encounters impacting our lives in visible ways. Join me in praying they continue to increase.

Monday: “Hear”

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

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| <p>Reflect: These are the words of “The Shema” – the foundational core of Israel’s faith. The title comes from the first word in verse four – <i>shema</i> – the Hebrew word for “hear”. However, there is more to this word than simply audible recognition.</p> <p>The Hebrew word “shema” means to “hear,” “listen,” “pay attention to,” and “obey”. In the book of Deuteronomy the connotation of “obey” is frequent (e.g., Deut11:13,27,28; 12:28; 13:18; 17:12; 28:1,2; etc.). As always, when God speaks He isn’t merely ‘flapping His jaw’ to hear Himself talk, He demands obedience.</p> <p>An obvious question arises for the Christian. How can YHWH be “one” if we believe in the Trinity? This is what many cults (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons – i.e., “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints”) will point out as being false about Christianity. Furthermore, “Tri-Theism” (a belief in three gods) is a charge Muslims will make against Christianity. What do we do?</p> | <p>Respond: Jesus quoted this verse as the “greatest commandment” in the New Testament (Mt22:36f; Mk12:28f). In light of that, how important does it make this saying for us?</p> <p>Read James 1:27-28. Can you see some parallels there with the expectations of the word “shema”?</p> <p>How do you answer the charge that Christians are “Tri-Theists” (i.e., we believe in three gods)?</p> |
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Pray: Thank God for our time of worship together as a body yesterday. Pray for a heart that not only wants to “hear” God – but also desires to “obey” Him. Pray for the continuing impact of CIY’s “Move” on those who attended last week.

Tuesday: YHWH is “one”

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

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| <p>Reflect: One verse, six words in Hebrew, 11 in English – but the implications of which can (and do) fill page after page and book after book. Why is it such an important verse?</p> <p>Furthermore, yesterday’s question is still out there. If God is in fact “one”; how can the Trinity be possible? Doesn’t “one” mean, well, “one”? Yes. However, the Hebrew word for “one” here is a word that designates a compound unity (e.g., Judg20:1). Some other occurrences of this word for “one” in the Bible are when there was both morning and evening (i.e., two distinct parts) the “first” day (Gen1:5). Also, Adam and Eve (two separate individuals) are said to be “one” flesh in marriage (Gen2:24).</p> <p>There is another word for “one” that means an absolute singularity (e.g., Gen22:2; Judg11:34); something that is indivisible. However, it is never used of God.</p> | <p>Respond: Jewish people would recite The Shema three times a day. How might pondering the implications of “The Shema” three times a day help you?</p> <p>Do you believe God is one?</p> <p>With a statements like “God is one” and beliefs such as “the Trinity” – can you see how the outside world is sometimes skeptical of Christianity? What can we do to help people understand better?</p> |
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Pray: Thank God for the clarity of His word. Thank God that we raised enough money to pay off one of our existing loans, which will free up money to put to use in other ways in God’s Kingdom. Pray for wisdom for NLCC’s leaders as they seek to be good stewards of God’s blessings towards us.

Wednesday: YHWH is a “unity”

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

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| <p>Reflect: Different day, same verse. Due to the fact that YHWH is “one,” He has unity in thoughts, plans, purposes, etc. Therefore, He has proven Himself time and time again. In other words, He can be trusted. He is faithful and reliable. There is no reason to doubt Him.</p> <p>On Sunday the first song we sang was “Arise”. The opening verse states, “One thing we ask of You; One thing that we desire; That as we worship You; Lord come and change our lives.” We can see the basis for the desire of that verse in Deuteronomy 6:5. Since YHWH is faithful to us, we should be towards Him too. Our response to Him should be with our whole person.</p> <p>The unity of God is upheld in the New Testament as well. In Ephesians Paul mentioned a list of “ones” (Eph4:4-6). God is united, not divided.</p> | <p>Respond: When was the most recent time you doubted God? How can you learn from that experience?</p> <p>Do you sing songs of praise to God throughout the week, or just on Sunday morning? Which one and why?</p> <p>Read Ephesians 4 and ponder the implications of the unity of God for the body of NLCC.</p> |
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Pray: Continue to pray for the families who received groceries from parts of NLCC’s body on 7/13; ask for God to continue to open doors and soften hearts. Pray for NLCC to constantly strive for unity in the faith and purity among those who attend here. Thank God for His faithfulness to us.

Thursday: YHWH is “unique”

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

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| <p>Reflect: Yes, we’re still on the same verse(s). Another part of God being “one” means that He is unique (i.e., one of a kind). There are no other gods beside Him (cf. Mk12:32). This verse can be seen as a polemic (or attack) against a belief in other gods. It also expounds on the first two commandments (e.g., Exod20:3,4).</p> <p>Since God is indeed unique, as we sang on Sunday, He alone is “worthy of our praise”. As that song (“You Are Worth of My Praise”) states, we should continually seek Him and strive to follow Him at all times.</p> <p>This is reflected in verse five. To a Hebrew person the “heart” is what we associate with the mind (intellect and will). The “soul” is a person’s life (desires and personal character). The word “strength” indicates the utmost of devotion and commitment. Each person is to be totally devoted to God.</p> | <p>Respond: Do you think people in our world are concerned if there is only one God? Why or why not?</p> <p>Based on God’s uniqueness, and the short explanation of v5, we can see that the “oneness of God” is to be matched by the “oneness” of our devotion to Him. How are you doing in this area?</p> <p>Of the three ‘areas’ of a person described in v5; which is the most devoted to God in your life? Which has the most struggles?</p> |
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Pray: Pray for those who will be teaching and preaching this Sunday; ask for God’s blessing on their preparation time. Pray that all who come to NLCC will become totally devoted to God. Confess to God your desire to be totally devoted to Him; ask for Him to show you an area that needs work as you strive towards that goal.