

Devotions before Worship

This is very much like the more extensive paper on personal quiet time—and rightly so. Our quiet time before worship is an abbreviated version of our daily quiet time before the Lord. Although we teach more extensively on this in the Spiritual Tools class, this is a good basic framework to help prepare to worship corporately:

START and END WITH THE PROPER ATTITUDES

In God's eyes, why we do something is far more important than what we do.

On one occasion God told Samuel, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV) It is quite possible to do the right thing but with the wrong attitude.*

This was Amaziah's problem, for "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord but not wholeheartedly." (2 Chronicles 25:2)

When you prepare to meet with God in worship, consider adopting these attitudes:

- Ready for business - *Remember that you are meeting with the Creator, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Redeemer of men. Be thoroughly rested and alert. The best preparation for worship begins the night before. Get to bed early enough so you will be in good shape to meet God and His people in the morning; He deserves your best, as you would do for business. Come ready to do business with your Creator—approach it as a special and privileged time, not an optional time that we do as a "favor" to God, somehow. Plan to arrive 5-10 minutes before worship to do your devotions.*
- Expectancy - *Come before God with anticipation and eagerness. Expect to have a good time of worship with Him and receive a blessing from your time with Him and His people in His Courts. That was what David expected: "O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You." (Psalm 63:1)*
- Reverence - *Don't rush into God's presence, but prepare your heart by being still before Him and letting the quietness clear away the thoughts of the world. Listen to the prophet Habakkuk: "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him." (Habakkuk 2:20; see also Psalm 89:7) Coming into the presence of the Lord is not like going to a football game or some other form of entertainment. In this instance, I recommend you (a) begin by thanking Him for something in your life, or something about Him, then (b) a short praise, such a line from a psalm, hymn or Christian song. Finally, (c) do a short personal confession—possibly the Jesus Prayer¹, then (d) invite the Holy Ghost to come to you. Ask Him to clear your mind, then exercise your will to that end. Then be quiet to hear Him speak to you and begin to prepare your soul and spirit to enter worship. Ask Him to prepare your heart to worship with all that you are—body, soul and spirit.*
- Jesus First - *This attitude is crucial: you don't come to worship to choose what you will do or not do, but with the purpose of doing anything and everything that God wants you to do. Jesus said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own." (John 7:17) So come to meet the Lord, having already chosen to do His will no matter what.*
- Spirit and Truth—*Finally, ask God the Holy Ghost to empower (a) you to worship in Spirit and Truth and (b) to bless and empower those around you, especially those in leadership—the clergy, choir, vestry, and altar servers, to that same end. Ask Him to cover the entire parish in the Blood of the Lamb and place a hedge of protection about it, then loose His angels of worship, fellowship and understanding among us all. In prayer, bind Satan from among us in Jesus' Name. Ask the Holy Ghost to make the Word, Sacrament and Liturgy Truth and Life to you and to change your life. Ask for the Joy of the Lord for you and everyone around you.*
- In the quiet time after the worship service, *when we await the server to extinguish the altar lights, thank God for His presence and time of worship and to bless everyone there with you that day. Then, when you hear the dismissal, "Let us forth in joy, to love and serve the Lord," you're ready to do just that! Alleluia, alleluia!*

¹¹ **THE JESUS PRAYER.** In order to enter more deeply into the life of prayer and to come to grips with St. Paul's challenge to pray unceasingly, consider using the Jesus Prayer, which is sometimes called the prayer of the heart. The Jesus Prayer is offered as a means of concentration, as a focal point for our inner life. Though there are both longer and shorter versions, the most frequently used form of the Jesus Prayer is: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." This prayer, in its simplicity and clarity, is rooted in the Scriptures and the new life granted by the Holy Spirit. It is first and foremost a prayer of the Spirit because of the fact that the prayer addresses Jesus as Lord, Christ and Son of God; and as St. Paul tells us, "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).