

I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” Psalm 122:1

It wasn't long after the attacks of 9/11 that the country singer Alan Jackson came out with a song titled, “*Remember When*.” In it, he touches on the soft side of nearly every person by asking them to remember significant events in their lives. With the timing of its release, it became a uniting theme to always remember the events of the day those planes crashed into the Twin Towers.

Of course, it wouldn't have taken a song for people to remember the events of that day. After all, ask anybody who was 13 years old or older in 2001 what they were doing when that tragedy struck, and many could probably tell you. That should really come as no surprise. Remembering significant events in our lives is a common thing. Just mentioning things like the space shuttle Challenger, Kennedy assassination, Russia invading Ukraine, or your favorite sports team winning the championship probably causes you to remember certain things.

Yet isn't it interesting - perhaps even disappointing - that as often as we remember past events in our lives and talk about them with family and friends, so rarely do we do this when it comes to our faith and our Savior.

1. Take a moment to recall something special or memorable from this past Sunday's worship service.
 - a. Why was it memorable?
 - b. In what way might it have focused your attention on your faith and Savior?
 - c. How might what you remember be something you can use to keep your heart and mind focused on Jesus and his Word throughout the week?

Prayer: Lord, keep me focused on you and your Word, and let nothing distract me. Amen.

When was the last time we reminisced, “Remember when we heard the words of absolution that one Sunday in service – boy I needed to hear that.” When was the last time we thought, “Remember when I went to my first Sunday school or Confirmation Class? Remember that one Bible Study and how we had the chance to be in the Word every Sunday?” When was the last time we sat around talking about the blessings of the Lenten and Easter season of ‘95, or ‘88, or 2015? When was the last time we spent time pondering with friends about how wonderful it was to walk away from the Lord’s Supper in the joy of forgiveness and the renewed strength to serve him in all we do. Or when was the last time you said, **“I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1).**

Is that our attitude when it comes to worship? Do those words flow from our tongues on Sunday morning? Or are we quick to come up with all sorts of reasons why it won’t work to be in church? But it is folly to claim that we can have love for any cause and then regularly neglect to participate in its most important activities. If we profess love for God’s Word and the Savior it reveals, and yet fail to use it and hear it we lie to ourselves and sin? After all, the Bible very plainly states, **“Where you treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).**

1. Choose one of the examples given in the first paragraph above. Then try to find sometime in your Christian/worship life that speaks to that point. Share if you are doing this devotion with others.

2. There are many events in the lives of Christians that are worthy to remember. What two might we say rise to the top as being ones we want to think about often?

3. Discuss/consider the sentence: *“it is folly to claim that we can have love for any cause and then regularly neglect to participate in its most important activities.”*

Prayer: Lord, keep me close to you and your Word so that I may grow in faith and love. Amen.

What is our attitude when it comes to worship? Do we come only out of a sense of duty, a feeling of necessity to maintain a religious reputation, the hope to get on God's good side, or some other motive which is less than love for God? Such attitudes will quickly and easily cause us to lose the joy of worshiping and serving the Lord.

So, how then do we truly say, **“I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.”** Well, the Christian’s joy in church attendance is born from a grateful recognition and acknowledgment of God’s goodness to us in seeking us and calling us out of darkness into the kingdom of his marvelous light. We are glad to be in church because here we hear proclaimed the testimony of the Lord, the glorious good news of Jesus, the Savior of sinners, our Savior and Redeemer from sin and death.

We experience joy and gladness in worship because here we learn how a just and holy God distributes justice with mercy. Here we learn how he can be both just and justifier of the sinner at the same time. Here we learn that he has punished Jesus in our place and credited Christ's holiness to us by faith in Jesus. We welcome the opportunity to be here because we are strengthened against the storms of life, we receive practical instruction in how to live to his glory, and we receive help when it comes to walking the path he desires for us.

1. What is your answer to the question that begins this devotion?
2. What is it that causes you to lose your joy of worshiping and serving the Lord?
3. Why can we have joy in worshiping the Lord?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the soul-nourishing truths of your Holy Word. Amen.

Sunday was a glorious day! Sunday we were privileged to be in God's house hearing his word in word and song. Sunday we again heard of God's love for us in Christ! We were able to say, **"I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord."**

But let it not be just on Sunday. Let it be every time there is opportunity to gather around God's Word in his house. To that end, it is my prayer that God keep us from indifference to his Word and give us a holy joy in the services of his house so that we will count a day spent in his Word better than a thousand elsewhere. So that our souls may long and hunger for the word of the Lord. So that we can be found saying again and again, remember when we heard God's praises in song; remember when God's Word reminded me again that I am his child through Christ; remember when I meditated on his Word in Bible Study and worship; remember when I went home with a renewed strength to live as a Christian; remember when Christ died for me.

1. Take time to say/memorize alone (or together) the Third Commandment and what does this mean. You will find it under this question in the back of this devotion.

2. This question is especially for parents. How can we help our children develop this love for being in God's house? *(those who are doing this and who don't have children or whose children are out of the house, how can you continue to develop a love and joy for being in God's house?)*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the comforting truths of your Holy Word. Amen.

Below is a devotion taken from a devotion book titled *On Giving Advice to God*.¹

Luke 2:15,16 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Now is all of that really necessary? Don't the shepherds show us here how really dim they are? Wouldn't we have expected some discussion of the matter first? It could have gone something like this: "Well, what should we do now? It's the middle of the night, hardly a time to be running through fields and streets to Bethlehem. Let's wait until morning and then go to investigate. That will be time enough. Besides that, we have to decide which of us should go and who should stay with the sheep. After all, if we all go, who knows how many of them will wander off; and then we will have who knows how much work to round them all up again."

But the shepherds are no more interested in our advice on this holy night than God is. No discussion. No debate. No delay. They hasten in the middle of the night. They run as fast as they can to Bethlehem. They poke around – peering into stables and stalls, into caves and caverns – looking for a baby lying in a cattle trough and wrapped in rags. Just thinking about it makes us marvel at the faith of these lowly shepherds: a faith created and spurred on by the message of the Lord.

What great saints they are! How they put the imagined virtue and piety of most of us (most of the time) to shame! When I wake up in the morning, I may sometimes be just too busy to hasten to the manger. During the day I have such important stuff to attend to – it won't get done by itself – that there just isn't time to turn my attention to the child in the straw – he'll still be there tomorrow. And by day's end, well, I'm just too tired to attend to anything more than the sports page and the television set. Tomorrow, later, when I'm old and retired – then I will think on these things. Maybe even on Sunday morning the enthusiasm of the shepherds sometimes flags a bit; it's too cold or too hot; I stayed up too late last night and I'm too tired; oh well, I'll go anyway, or maybe not.

But unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given. It is the Savior, Christ the Lord. Let us hasten with the shepherds to see this wondrous thing that the Lord has made known to us.

Pastors have stood in for the angels through the years as they have brought glad tidings of great joy for all people, and yes, even for me. How my soul yearns and my heart longs to go and see him in his Word, in his Sacrament. Let us hasten then to our Bethlehem: to the place where he is to be found, where his Word and sacraments are. For there he is, in the company of sheep and goats and with lowly shepherds bowing low before him. There he wants to be found; it is where he has promised always to be, where his Word and sacraments are. Yes, and there he wants to find us, still wants to find us. Isn't it sad that so few found him that Christmas night so that they could be found by him in the message of the angels? Isn't it sad that so many – still after all these years – really just can't be bothered? Or worse, that at times even we find it all a bother?

But still, there he is in the manger, holding out his arms and awaiting our embrace of faith. Still, there he is, looking for the messy manger of our hearts. Still, there he is, longing not for our help but to be our helper, not so much to receive our gifts to him as to be God's gift to us for time and for eternity. There he is: our Jesus!

Prayer: One thing's needful; Lord, this treasure, teach me highly to regard.

All else, though it first give pleasure, is a yoke that presses hard.

Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving, No true, lasting happiness ever deriving.

This one thing is needful; all others are vain – I count all but loss that I Christ may obtain. Amen.
(CW 290:1)

¹ *On Giving Advice to God: Devotions on the Wisdom of God and the Foolishness of Man (Part 1).*

Below is an excerpt from a devotion taken from a devotion book titled *On Giving Advice to God*.²

Romans 12:1,2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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.

A renewed mind starts the day with the intention, yes, the fervent desire, the longing, to not be conformed to this world and its mind-set, its motivation. What do I want for this day? For this day I long to live with Jesus. This day I want to think about things that please him. This day I long to kick the devil and his *Me-firstism* out of my mind and heart. This day I want to have as my great joy the honor of serving my family, my community, and my church just because I know that it pleases him. This day I want my patience to be like his. This day I long to be as forgiving of others as he is of me. Yes, this day I want to treasure all that God has said and given in his Word and sacraments about everything that I have. This day I will set aside all my own foolish notions and petty opinions that run contrary to his Word.

1. How does this devotion and the words of Romans 12 fit into our week long discussion of Psalm 122:1 – “I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord”?”

Prayer: Dear Lord and Savior, give me ears to hear your living and life-giving Word and your Spirit to live a fruitful life that honors your name. Amen.

^{2 2} *On Giving Advice to God: Devotions on the Wisdom of God and the Foolishness of Man (Part 2).*

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ANSWER PAGES

PAGE 1

Each of the questions on page 1 are going to be subjective (based on your personal feelings and experience from the worship service). I am not even able to give an example since at the time of this writing the service hasn't taken place yet.

PAGE 2

1. Choose one of the examples given in the first paragraph above. Then try to find sometime in your Christian/worship life that speaks to that point. Share if you are doing this devotion with others. Each of you will have different answers. However, perhaps I can share some of mine. I still remember the Lenten/Easter season of 2010. I remember it, in part, because I did not do a Lenten rotation and so I preached each Sunday and each Wednesday. But it was such a joy to take the Lenten season in order and to have opportunity to be with the people I served each Wednesday as we looked at our suffering Savior willingly going to the cross for us. Other things that come to my mind are worshiping with 2,500 other teens and adults at youth rallies and the joint district Reformation service in Madison. I also fondly remember the first worship service that we gathered together for after the pandemic shut-down.
2. There are many events in the lives of Christians that are worthy to remember. What two might we say rise to the top as being ones we want to think about often? The two that were on my mind as I wrote this question were our baptism and our confirmation. Consider the blessings God bestowed on us the day of our baptism as he either created faith or strengthened faith as he put his name on us. What a promise he gives to us at our baptisms! Then, consider the promises we make to him at our confirmation, as we promised to faithfully conform our life to the teachings of God's Word and to be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God as long as we live. How important it is for us to remember those promises often.
3. Discuss/consider the sentence: *"it is folly to claim that we can have love for any cause and then regularly neglect to participate in its most important activities."* You might wonder what or how much there is to discuss about this sentence. After all, it is pretty straightforward. But don't pass it by too quickly. The reason I ask you to discuss/consider it, is so that our sin can be exposed and that we can take that sin to our Savior's cross. Where have we neglected the most important activity of listening to God in his Word? Then forgiven, realize how phony it can be to say that I love God and love his Word, but then fail to make use of it on a regular basis. As you discuss this, realize what it is saying. If I say that I love God and his Word, does skipping church demonstrate that? If I say that I love God and his Word, does neglecting personal devotions demonstrate that? If I say that I love God and his Word yet I haven't received the Sacrament of communion in over 6 months, does that demonstrate that? Then there is this. Sometimes we are quick to point to things like – I take care of my family, I faithfully use my gifts at work, I obey my parents, I try to be nice and not hurt anybody, I'm a good neighbor – and then we say "See, I love God," while all the while not making use of his Word. What this often indicates is a desire to tell God what you consider to be the important activities he should want you to do, instead of listening to what God tells you are the important activities to do. He wants you first of all to listen to him in his Word. Yes, he wants you to do those others things too. But he first wants you to listen to his Word. We don't have to the right to tell him, "Look Lord, I've done all these things, you should be satisfied with that and not worry about me being in the Word." How dare we!

PAGE 3

1. What is your answer to the question that begins this devotion? You will have to answer this question for yourself. But be honest. Admit those times when you have come with less than joy in your heart. Lay any sin that you see at the foot of your Savior's cross and know that he paid for it there, even before you recognized that it was a sin. (Please understand, not every time we come with less than joy does it mean we are guilty of sin. Sometimes a storm may have kept us up at night and we come tired, or maybe we

aren't feeling well. Even at these times we can come with joy, but just because we might not have as much joy does not mean we have sinned)

2. What is it that causes you to lose your joy of worshiping and serving the Lord? This is closely connected to the previous question, and it is possible that you already answered it if your thoughts/discussion took you a little farther in the previous question. However, if you didn't get too deep into the previous question, this one is meant to get you deeper. What has caused you to lose your joy? Is it a result of one of the reasons mentioned in the first paragraph? If so, notice how they flow from a work-righteous mentality. Notice how those flow from an idea that worship is mostly about me doing something. The reality is though that worship has less to do with what we do, and is more about what God is doing for us. The more we see that worship is about God giving us what we so desperately need, the more we see it is pure joy to have the opportunity to be fed by our great and gracious God. You may find some other things that seek to rob you of joy in coming to worship as well – being tired or sick, problems with a fellow member, frustrations with a pastor, etc. Tomorrow we will have a question that touches on these.
3. Why can we have joy in worshiping the Lord? Because of what he does for us here. Consider this. We do not come to worship to make God happy. God is happy with you because you belong to Christ and are redeemed by his sacrificial life and death. We do not come to worship to simply obey the Third Commandment. It is true that skipping church means you despise preaching and his word. It is a sin of which we must repent. But if going to church is only about keeping the Third Commandment, your reason for going is to jump through a hoop to appease God. Your motive, then, is corrupt. Your worship will not please God. We do not come to worship so that others will see you and, thus, think well of you. This would make you a hypocrite – looking pious on the outside but being far from God in your heart. While others might be impressed with your attendance, God would know better.

We come to church because here God fills us with heavenly riches. We come with our sins, guilt and shame, but here he offers relief from all these things. We come because we suffer trials and temptations; because we live in a world of evil; because we are sinners and can't fix it; because we are weak and frail – but here God gives his greatest blessings to us. He tells us we are forgiven in Christ. He blesses us as his dearly loved children. His promises are declared in the lessons. His mercy is applied in the sermon. His grace is given in the liturgy. His glory is sung about in song. He puts his name on us and blesses us. What week don't we want these? What week don't we need these. This is our joy! Every week, without fail, God gives these. Every week, God serves us – for our benefit, for our comfort, for our salvation.

PAGE 4

1. Take time to say/memorize alone (or together) the Third Commandment and what does this mean. You will find it under this question in the back of this devotion.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy, and gladly hear and learn it.

Sabbath means rest. It is speaking about the spiritual rest that Jesus gives through the forgiveness of sins. In the what does this mean, we receive explanation of what the Sabbath is for us – the gladly hearing and learning of God's Word.

2. This question is especially for parents. How can we help our children develop this love for being in God's house? (*those who are doing this and who don't have children or whose children are out of the house, how can you continue to develop a love and joy for being in God's house?*) **Parents – nothing beats modeling it.**

Consider how this is done.

We model love and joy for God's house by being there every Sunday. What are we saying when we skip certain days? We are saying it isn't that important, it isn't that vital. Things that aren't important and vital aren't usually seen as joyful. In fact, if we skip for the purpose of sports or something else,

what are we saying? We say this other thing is more enjoyable and we love it more. No amount of telling them that church is important and joyful and that we should love it will undo what they see by what you do.

This is done by what we say.

If we speak poorly of worship (too early, not a good time, cuts into my day, I just don't have time, I'm not a fan of pastor, pastor's sermons are too long, his sermons are boring, I don't like the members, I wish the people were more friendly, etc.), your children will pick up on it. Your negativity toward the people, the pastor, the atmosphere will rub off on them and they will sour on being there.

This is done by what we do during the week.

We need to be in the word (personally) and we need to be in the word (as a family during the week. When time is set aside, and your children see that the word has value for more than one hour on Sunday, they see the need, the benefit and the joy of being in the word on Sunday. Nothing can replace you, the parent, and the instruction that God has given to you: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4). Make time for the Word and show how important it is to you and them during the week (and do this from when they are little) and it will very naturally flow into Sundays.

Non-parents – or parents whose children are grown

First, the Word of God has a beautiful cycle built into it. The Word brings us to faith. Faith leads us to see that the food for our soul is the Word and we want to be in it more. The more we are in it, the more our faith grows and matures. The more our faith grows and matures the more we want to be in the word. And the cycle continues. How do we grow in our love for worship and the word? Be in the Word more!

But we can say more. Consider yesterday's answer to question #2. What are some things that have robbed us of joy? Did you say being tired? Well, perhaps we need to change our Saturday evening routine. God and his Word are worthy and deserving of us going to bed earlier so that we are awake and joy-filled to hear his word. Is joy muted because we have an issue with the pastor? Go talk to him. Do we have less joy because we are having an issue with a fellow member? Remember God's blueprint for dealing with our fellow believers – talk to them with words seasoned with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. Be willing to confront sin, and be willing to repent and ask for forgiveness, and be willing to give forgiveness. If help is needed in this relationship, talk to pastor. Is the attitude/culture of the congregation different than you hoped? Maybe you are one who, by your involvement and words of encouragement can help change that attitude. Ask God for strength and wisdom to do so.

PAGE 6

1. How does this devotion and the words of Romans 12 fit into our week long discussion of Psalm 122:1 – "I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord"? The renewal of our mind takes place through the word. Every part of our life is one that we want to live for God. Where will the motivation come from? Answer: Christ and his Word! Where will the strength to do it come from? Answer: Christ and his Word! How will we know what God wants us to be doing? Answer: From what he has revealed to us in his Word! The devotion fits nicely into our week-long discussion as it ties our everyday life to everything he says in his Word. God help us to make his word the one thing needful, and then Lord, help us to give ourselves to you – always asking, "What do you want me to do, Lord?"