

Laying Down Crowns

Call to Worship

As the deer longs for a stream of cool water, so I long for you O God. I thirst for you, the living God; when can I go and worship in your presence? Psalm 117 (GNB)

The answer is – now! Whether you are worshiping together in church, or on your own, by the grace of Jesus' sacrifice you can worship in his presence right now.

Prayer

Father God, my heart *does* long for your presence, and I come now seeking forgiveness for those things I have thought, said, or done that has damaged my relationship with you. I pray for the Holy Spirit to come, bringing rivers of living water as I worship you today. Amen

Song: "O for a heart to praise my God" (Charles Wesley)

1. O for a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free.
a heart that always feels thy blood so freely shed for me:
2. a heart resigned, submissive, weak, my great Redeemer's throne,
where only Christ is heard to speak, where Jesus reigns alone:
3. A humble, lowly, contrite heart, believing, true, and clean,
which neither life nor death can part from him that dwells within:
4. a heart in every thought renewed, and full of love divine,
perfect, and right, and pure, and good, a copy Lord of thine.
5. Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart: come quickly from above,
write thy new name upon my heart, thy new, best name of love.

Prayer of Intercession

Lord, I weep with those who have been stricken with the horrors of war. I pray for those who have lost family members in Israel through acts of terrorism, and for all those who suffer as a consequence of those acts. I pray for the nation of Israel as it bulwarks itself in the face of threats of extinction. I pray that that nation will be restored to your kingdom. Lord, have mercy.

And I pray for the Palestinians caught up in that conflict, and particularly for Palestinian Christians targeted by terrorist groups for their faith. Lord, have mercy.

And I pray for the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and again pray especially for Christians, and their churches, who face death and hunger daily. Lord, have mercy.

I thank and praise you Lord, for those such as Barnabas Aid which bring sustenance, comfort, aid, and hope.

And Lord, I pray for those in my family, my church, and neighbourhood who face a different sort of fear. For those with health issues, those with cancer diagnoses, those with financial troubles, those with uncertain futures. Lord, have mercy.

I bring these prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen

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Bible Reading:

Galatians 5:13-26 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

The acts of the flesh are obvious:sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying one another.

Song: "When I survey the wondrous cross" (Isaac Watts)

1. When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.
2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most; I sacrifice them to his blood.
3. See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown.
4. Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small:
love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Message: "Laying Down Crowns"

John Stott was at one time chaplain to the Queen, and she once said to him that she wished Jesus would return in her lifetime. When asked why, she said so that she could lay her crown at his feet. She was queen of half the planet and she wanted to lay her crown, and the power and prestige it represented, at the feet of Jesus!

We have about 30 kingdoms in the world today (no queendoms yet but you never know!). Some are big, and some are tiny. King Charles 111 has the biggest. King Philippe is the king of Belgium, which is much smaller, but not as small as a few others in Europe. Queen Margreth is the monarch of Denmark. She is in her eighties, and Prince Frederik will take over with his wife Mary (who could probably easily be elected Queen of Tasmania!). Some Asian countries are also kingdoms. King Norodom Sihamoni is the king of Cambodia (no

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tears for Pol Pot!), and King Maha Vajiralongkorn (yes, I had to check the spelling!) is king of Thailand.

How many hundreds, even thousands of times have we said “Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven”? We have prayed that God’s kingdom will encompass the whole planet and that every knee will bow to the Kingship of the Lord Jesus. I’m not sure how many kings and queens would have the attitude of Queen Elizabeth; probably not many. One day they will all bow the knee and relinquish their crowns to him. As will Putin and Zelenski. As will Xi JinPi ng and Joe Biden, and Rishi Sunak and King Charles, Albo and Malinauskus. Psalm 93:1: **The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty, the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength; indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.** We look at a world riven by conflict and insecurity and yearn for a world like that.

We may wish that the world leaders and governments would read and take on board Philippians 2:10-11: **..at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** It would be good if knees were bowed and crowns surrendered, but, what about our crowns and our knees. We can’t ignore that it says *every knee should bow, every tongue confess*, and that includes mine. There are some crowns in our lives that are not so easily laid down. There are some parts of our lives that we may be reluctant to totally give over to the Lordship of Jesus.

There are a couple of things that we may find particularly hard to hand over. The first is the guilt of failure - the shame of not quitting habits, of a lapsed resolve, the shame of hurts inflicted on others, the shame of our inadequacies and weaknesses. Even though we know that God can see what’s in our hearts, shame and guilt want to hide it, and while hidden, it puts us into bondage and slavery, and we cannot grow into the fulness that God has for us. The line in “Rock of Ages” says it all – we ask of Jesus , “be of sin the double cure, save me from its guilt and power”. We must bow our knee to Jesus, leave this at his feet, and not take it back again.

The second is the glory of success. Sometimes we ask God to help us to victory over challenges that face us, and when it happens, we forget to give glory to him and rather revel in the accolades we receive. That is a crown that we need to lay at the feet of Jesus.

It’s necessary for us to relinquish ourselves and our free will to the Lordship of Jesus, and that is what he expects of us.

John 14:23: **Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.**

Galatians 5:1: **It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**

Sounds simple really! Turn our lives over to Jesus, he has lifted the burden of sin and has promised a life of freedom. Good deal?

But then the arguments in our head start.

Question: Am I giving up my freedom? Am I putting myself under a regime of dos and don’ts?

Answer: To remain under the influence of sin is not freedom, it is bondage of the worst

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kind. It is the father of lies, Satan himself, who perpetrates that lie and he has had plenty of practice. He started in the Garden of Eden with Eve – “Surely you will not die if you eat the forbidden fruit. God is restricting your freedom. Go, eat and enjoy.” God is the author of truth. John 8:31-32: **If you hold to my truth, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.**

Question: Won't I lose my right to self-determination, to take responsibility for the direction and decisions of my life?

Answer: That really means you believe that you, yourself, are in the best position, with all your experience and wisdom, to know what is best. Or, that you know better than God, the one who made you and gave you your life, and who loves you. That means putting yourself on the throne and deposing God. It may seem like freedom but compare this to John 8:38: **If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.** When Jesus is King your future is assured. When he is on the throne, all things work together for good (Romans 3:28).

Question: Won't that mean the end of fun and the enjoyable things in my life?

Answer: There are a couple of assumptions here. Firstly, that discipleship and obedience to the commands of Jesus *aren't* fun. And secondly, that God frowns on fun. My brother once lived with a couple of other young men and in discussion, revealed that he didn't smoke, gamble, get drunk, or engage in casual sex. They were amazed and said, “Well, what do you do for sin?”! The assumption of course is that sin is fun. Much of Scripture counters this view. The fruits of the Spirit include love and joy. Sounds like fun! The desires of the flesh however (Galatians 5 above) don't sound like much fun at all. Many Psalms indicate what a joy it is to obey God's laws, and Jesus said that he has come so that we may have life and have it to the full. Sounds like fun!

Question: It's just too hard to hand over stuff and then to maintain the continuous discipline required.

Answer: It's true that discipleship is not always easy, and sometimes it's very hard. But don't discount the power of the Holy Spirit, and the promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13-14: **No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so you can endure it.** And as we grow in our relationship with the Father, and the Son, the Holy Spirit leads us to a place where David found himself in Psalm 40:8: **I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.**

Giving ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus gives us new life. We can sing with Alan Jackson in his well-known hymn:

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down.
I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it some day for a crown.

Song: “O the bitter shame and sorrow” (by Theodore Monod)

1. O the bitter shame and sorrow, that a time could ever be
when I let the Saviour's pity plead in vain, and proudly answered:
All of self, and none of Thee!

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2. Yet He found me. I beheld Him bleeding on the accursed tree,
heard Him pray "Forgive them Father!" And my wistful heart said faintly:
Some of self, and some of Thee!
3. Day by day His tender mercy, healing, helping full and free,
sweet and strong, and ah! so patient, brought me lower, while I whispered:
Less of self, and more of Thee!
4. Higher than the highest heaven, deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last hath conquered; Grant me now my supplication:
None of self, and all of Thee!

Benediction

Father, I submit my life and my crowns to you, and lay them at your feet. I submit my burdens and my discipleship to Jesus and lay them at the cross. May the power of the Holy Spirit sustain and lead me in all I do and say, today, tomorrow, and always. Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA