

Brothers and sisters,

Rodger Cobia and I were recently discussing ways in which all of us can give the Lord our very best when we come to regular assemblies. As he has stated, even publically, on various occasions it all comes back to individual preparation before Sunday.

I would, thus, like to begin a weekly email with a few short encouraging thoughts, preparing us for Sunday worship. My emails will be sent out on Fridays, so expect the first one this Friday (June 6). (If you find them to be helpful, feel free to share them with others; this might open up doors for sharing the gospel with our non-Christian friends.)

The practice of sending out such emails does not need to be limited to something I do; I hope others will do the same—on Fridays or any other day of the week.

To God be the glory!

Marshall

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message

“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!” (Ps. 8:1).

Amazing! The LORD can be OUR Lord. Indeed, worship is possible only because God has graciously chosen to enter into relationship with us and exalt us above the rest of His creation. Yet, we must always humbly return the glory to God. Worship is all about God, not us, but it does connect us to God. When we assemble this Sunday, let’s approach God as He is—the majestic Lord. That will change the way we pray, the way we sing, the way we commune, the way we study, the way we give. “To God be the glory, great things He hath done!” (Crosby).

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (Jas. 4:8).

Sometimes we feel distanced from God, yet, the Bible contradicts our feelings with a promise—God is near (see Acts 17:27). Furthermore, He draws still nearer when we draw near to Him. So how do we get close to God? The Bible presents a simple answer: we accept by faith the salvation and hope of our compassionate Savior (see Eph. 2:13; Heb. 7:19); then, we remove all barriers between us and God (see Jas. 4:8-9); and, finally, we connect with the Lord through worship. Worship draws us close to God and consequently draws Him closer to us! Let’s remember these truths on Sunday.

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message

“Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16).

One significant part of the Lord's day is the Lord's supper. Communion is by no means, of course, part of a sacramental system, as it has been designated by various religious groups, but neither is it merely a representation of the fellowship with have with Christ. The Bible says that the cup and the bread are both a sharing (or fellowship or communion) with the blood and body of Christ. Never, never, never should we merely get to church simply to make sure we fulfill our obligation to eat and drink; we come together to share in God! We need to prepare for our Sunday-discerning of the Lord's body; let's get ready now for this extraordinary aspect of collective worship, our sharing in the blood and body of Christ.

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name” (Ps. 100:4).

Worship is about saying “thank you” to God. It’s not really about what we get out of worship; when this psalm was written, the Israelites served God, at least in part, by slaughtering innocent animals; where is the entertainment value there?! The psalmist of Psalm 100 recognized that the duty of all creation—physical and spiritual—is to worship and serve the Lord. Why? Because He had made them and showed them great mercy. The goodness, lovingkindness, and faithfulness of God ought to elicit the same response in us. Let’s say “thank you” to God right now, but let’s also prepare to join voices with other saints this Sunday and express our sincere thanksgiving and praise to the Lord together.

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message

“But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning” (Ps. 59:16).

There will be times when we don't feel like worshiping God. When David wrote Psalm 59, Saul's men were watching David's house, ready to pounce on him. Talk about a cause for discouragement. Worship would be the last thing on some of our minds in such circumstances. Not so with David. He trusted God and vowed to sing—yes, sing!—of God's strength (not his enemies' power) and of His lovingkindness (not their animosity). David focused on God. Have we had “enemies” against us this week? Sunday there will be singing. Are we ready to join in?

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message

“Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in holy array” (Ps. 29:1-2).

God deserves all the glory. It is due Him. Regardless of who we are—“sons of the mighty” or less—we are called on to give glory and strength to the Lord. Indeed, this is the ultimate purpose of mankind; we—especially Christians—have been created to be to “the praise of His glory” (see Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). Therefore, when we come to “worship the LORD” and do so “in holy array” God is glorified. On the first day of the week we gather together to praise the Lord collectively; let’s prepare now to give God the glory that is due His name.

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message
Friday, July 18

“Abraham said to the young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you’” (Gen. 22:5).

Though important lessons can be learned concerning Abraham’s faith from the preceding passage, there are three words that deserve attention: “we will worship.” Note that Abraham and Isaac were heading to a specific place—a mountain in Moriah—to engage in a specific activity—worship of the Lord (sacrifice). In similar fashion, Christians gather for worship every Sunday; we meet in a certain place—the assembly—in order to worship—communing, singing, praying, studying, giving. We ought to get ready for this important activity ahead of time, humbling ourselves before God, prioritizing the assembly (time, place, etc.), and preparing our minds for action. What are we going to do this Lord’s Day? “We will worship.”

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message
Friday, August 1

“For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints” (2 Cor. 8:3-4).

There is a renewed push among some to relegate the contribution on the first day of the week to either non- or pseudo-worship; yet, the act of freewill offering has been associated with divine service from the ancient times. The first-day-of-the-week collection is particularly associated with favor (grace) and fellowship (participation) in the text cited above. On Sunday when we give into the treasury for the support of the saints, we will be demonstrating to God that we are serious about storing up treasures in heaven and sowing bountifully toward the cause of Christ (see Matt. 6:19-21;; 2 Cor. 9:6-11). Let’s prepare now, setting something aside, so that we can cheerfully and reverently worship God in our giving.

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message
Friday, August 8

“What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15).

In the first century, believers were given miraculous gifts from the spirit—prophecy, miracles, healings, tongues, etc. Yet, some of those same saints were abusing the gifts, and while they might be praying and singing words inspired by God, they were doing so with wrong motives. The apostle Paul, therefore, exhorted them not only to pray and sing with the spirit but also with the mind. We can sometimes fall into a similar trap; we pray or sing the right words but with little or no understanding. Worship is not the time to let our minds slip into neutral; worship is a time to engage, to think, to meditate. This Sunday, when we praise God in prayer, song, communion, giving, study, let's consider what we are doing and so give God the glory.

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message
Friday, August 15

“Behold, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD, who serve by night in the house of the LORD! Lift up your hands to the sanctuary and bless the LORD. May the LORD bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 134:1-3).

As the last of the Songs of Ascents—songs intimately connected with the Jewish temple worship—Psalm 134 concludes the service day by calling on the servants of the Lord, probably Levites, to bless the Lord. In this way, the blessings of God were continually petitioned, even into the night, beginning anew with the evening sacrifice (see 1 Chron. 9:33; Exod. 29:39, 42). The picture presented is one of perpetual worship and service to God, but such was merely a shadow of the reality the Lord had planned for us. Like the servants of old, we too may bless God day and night. Yet, even our service to God is but a glimmer of the eternal worship that will be offered in the heavenly temple. How wonderful that will be! This Sunday, as we worship the Lord, let’s remember the pictures of continual worship in the Old Testament, give our very best in the present, and look forward to the perpetual service to the Lord in heaven.

WORSHIP MATTERS
A Weekly Email Message
Friday, August 22

“Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips’” (Hos. 14:2).

Israel had “stumbled because of [their] iniquity” and was called on to “return . . . to the LORD [their] God” (Hos. 14:1). But how could they turn back to God? Their salvation would not come by offering vain sacrifices or relying on world powers (see vv. 2-3). Instead, they were expected to “take words with [them],” confessing their faults to the Lord, so that they could be forgiven and fellowshiped by God. They would, then, be prepared to “present the fruit of [their] lips” in worship. Such is an illustration of the spiritual reality we enjoy (see Heb. 13:15). It is through the Lord that we experience forgiveness and are thus able to offer up continual, sacrificial praise to God. This Sunday, let’s “give thanks to His name,” knowing that “with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16).

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, August 29

“Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” (Ps. 2:11-12).

Psalm 2 is a prophetic song, predicting the rule of the Lord with His Messiah (Jesus). While the nations would fight against Him, God would laugh and scoff at their futile attempts to subvert His plan (see vv. 1, 4). Yet, not even Hades (death) itself could stop Jesus establishing His kingdom, for God would raise Him from the dead (see Matt. 16:18; Ps. 2:7-8). The exhortation to kings and judges (and, in reality, all people) therefore was (and is) to “worship,” “rejoice,” and “do homage” to the Lord and His Son (Ps. 2:10-12). Why? Because if we do not give God what He deserves (worship), He will become angry and His wrath will be quickly kindled (see v. 12). Yet, “how blessed are all who take refuge [or trust] in Him!” (v. 12). This Sunday, mingling fear and faith, let’s give the Lord what He deserves—joyful, reverent worship.

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, September 5

“Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension” (1 Tim. 2:8).

Having urged that entreaties, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all people, the apostle Paul shifts into a discussion of the roles of men and women; he concludes that the men (males) are to be the ones who lead the prayers in every place—seemingly he is discussing mixed company or specifically the assemblies. But gender role limitations are not the only conditions that are placed on the offerings of such prayers. They are to be offered while “lifting up consecrated hands.” The emphasis does not appear to be on the mode—“lifting up hands”—but on the quality—“lifting up consecrated hands.” The principle seems obvious enough; whether we are leading or participating in prayers public or private, we must make sure that we are coming to the Lord with purified hands, because it is impossible to draw near to God otherwise (see Jas. 4:8). Before we come together to worship on Sunday, let’s confess our sins to God—if there are sins that need confessing—and let’s consecrate ourselves to offer the spiritual sacrifices that are pleasing to Him.

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, September 12

“And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever’” (Rev. 5:13).

Terms such as “majestic,” “glorious,” “awesome,” and “magnificent” can only convey in a limited way the splendor of the supernatural vision of worship displayed in the throne scene of Revelation (chs. 4-5). Yet—though we too-often fail to attain it—this is what we strive to attain every time we praise God. Worship is to be universal; everything has been created to praise God. Worship is to be focused; God must be the target of our praise. Worship is everlasting; since the Lord is eternal, “blessing and honor and glory and dominion” are His “forever and ever.” Herein, however, is the amazing part of worship—God allows us to worship Him; and if we serve Him in this life, we will be graced with the privilege of praising Him for all eternity. This Sunday, let’s elevate our worship to the next level, patterning the heavenly worship; let’s, with all reverence and humility, glorify the Father (“He who sits on the throne”), the Son (“the Lamb”), and the Spirit (“the seven Spirits who are before the throne,” Rev. 1:4).

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, September 19

“The LORD is my salvation and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; my father’s God, and I will extol Him” (Exod. 15:2).

The Red Sea had parted—allowing the Israelites to pass through unharmed—but it had collapsed on their enemies the Egyptians (see Exod. 14:21-30). The record then says, “When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses” (14:31). They, therefore, broke out in singing to the Lord, and it is noteworthy in the text that salvation and song are joined and fixed in God (see 15:1-2). He is “salvation;” He is “song;” but it doesn’t stop there; we must make it personal; He must be “my God,” and “I” must “praise Him.” Is that me?! Is that you? We have been saved in a far greater way—delivered from the bondage of sin and the oppressor Satan—and yet at times don’t we view singing (individual and congregational) as merely optional? It is so easy to let our minds drift, and to keep our mouths closed. But if “the Lord is [our] salvation and song,” how can we keep from singing?! This Sunday, if we truly fear the Lord and believe in Him, let’s enthusiastically sing to our God who is our salvation and our song!

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, September 26

“Moses said to the congregation, ‘This is the thing which the LORD has commanded to do’” (Lev. 8:5).

The book of Leviticus is too-often overlooked and underappreciated; yet, though relating to the practices of the Old Testament, it is a book about approaching God appropriately. Following the statement quoted above, Leviticus repeats the phrase “just as the LORD had commanded Moses” (or some variant of it) some 12 times. If we learn anything about worship from the book of Leviticus, it is that when God commands, we must do! There are too many in the religious world today that appear to care less about what God has revealed concerning our worship of Him and more about how they feel following their so-called worship of Him. (Just as one famous “pastor” has said recently, “When you come to church, when you worship Him, you’re not doing it for God really. You’re doing it for yourself, because that’s what makes God happy.”) If, however, we recognize who God is and what He has done for us, we will do whatever “thing[s] which the LORD commanded to do,” whether we particularly like them or not. Worship all about God! This Sunday when we come together we must do so according to God’s pattern and with a spirit of adoration and sincerity. May the Lord bless us as we endeavor to do what He commands.

WORSHIP MATTERS

Friday, October 3

“The LORD bless you, and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine on you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace” (Num. 6:24-26).

The Aaronic priesthood was charged with blessing the sons of Israel, and the Lord Himself would be the agent of blessing; the priests would merely “invoke [His] name on the Israelites, and God would bless them. The result of such action would be, as the benediction states, blessing, protection, glory, grace, joy, and peace from the Lord. The same is true of the New Covenant priesthood and people; God is the source of all good, and as we—the priests and sons of God—allow His name to be placed on us by Jesus Christ our High Priest, the Lord makes the same promise: He blesses! This Sunday, when we assemble, let’s remember the blessing (Num. 6:24-26), invite the Lord’s presence among us, and give thanks for His bountiful, continual providence.

WORSHIP MATTERS

Friday, October 10

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4-6).

The chief aim of God’s people is to love Him—affectionately, passionately, zealously. And why are we to do so? Simply stated, because He is GOD! What’s more, He is OUR God. Everything that is important to us should be based on this relationship; but that raises a vital question: Is our connection to God really that important to us? Love for God is not merely a “better-felt-than-told” emotion; it is expressed through action, and perhaps the purest manifestation of love for God is worship—heartfelt, reverent adoration. “Our greatest claim to nobility is our created capacity to know God, to be in personal relationship with Him, to love Him and serve Him. Indeed we are most truly human when we are on our knees before our Creator” (Stott). This Sunday, let’s not just think, It’s time to go to church, but instead, It’s now my privilege to tell the Lord, “I love You!”

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, October 17

“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15).

In every generation, a choice must be made: serve God (with an uppercase G) or gods (with a lowercase g)? And while it was originally presented to an entire nation, in reality the decision had to be made individually and personally. Joshua led the way; he chose the Lord, and he led his family—wife, child(ren), grandchild(ren)—to do the same. What will we decide? If we are not yet children of God, the initial choice is still before us—and it should be made “today.” As Christians who have already promised service to the Lord, we must continue to choose God every day, with every decision. Jesus says disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him (Lk. 9:24). We will be given an opportunity to choose God or gods this Sunday; will we assemble with other Christians and serve God, or will we be absent (in body or in mind) and serve gods?—and among those “gods” is the infamous god named “Self.” Let’s “dare to stand like Joshua” and say in word and deed this Sunday, “As for me and for my house, we will serve the Lord!”

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, October 24

“That the leaders led in Israel, / That the people volunteered, / Bless the LORD! / . . . / My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel, / The volunteers among the people; / Bless the LORD!” (Judg. 5:2, 9).

The Israelites had just won a great victory against Canaanite horde that had subdued them—or, more appropriately, the Lord had secured their success. With great joy in her heart, Deborah the prophetess and judge, along with Barak, sang this glorious refrain: “Bless the LORD!” Yes, the commanders and the soldiers had done their part, but truly, as always, “the battle [was] the LORD’s” (1 Sam. 17:47). Thus the cry went forth, “Bless the LORD!” It was this same sentiment that was echoed in the New Testament in light of the great victory Christ had over Satan: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). And it is here that we find ourselves. We have overcome, not of ourselves but through Him. We are “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37, NKJV). We have probably seen God’s providential victories in our lives this week, so this Sunday let’s come together and sing with one voice, “Bless the Lord!”

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, October 31

“May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge” (Ruth 2:12).

The story of Ruth is a glorious ray of light in the midst of a dark period in Israelite history—the period of the Judges, when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Though she was a foreigner, a Moabitess, Ruth had married a Hebrew named Chilion, the son of Naomi. In the course of time, Naomi’s husband and sons died, leaving her and her daughters-in-law—including Ruth—as widows. Yet, Ruth demonstrated great love and commitment to Naomi, even refusing to go back to her own family. Ruth famously said, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried” (Ruth 1:16-17). So Naomi and Ruth returned to Israel, and eventually Ruth was rewarded by the Lord for her selflessness and dedication (see 2:11-12). Though we may not always see it, there is always good that comes from doing good (see Gal. 6:9). This Sunday let’s not second-guess our decision to worship with the saints; it is good (see Ps. 122:1); the Lord will reward our work and provide in full, as we come to Him in faith.

WORSHIP MATTERS

Friday, November 7

“Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the LORD has helped us’” (1 Sam. 7:12).

The people had been admonished to “return to the LORD with all [their] heart,” “remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among [them],” “direct [their] hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone,” with the attached promise that “He [would] deliver [them]” from their enemies (v. 3). The sons of Israel acted on the commands, and after prayer, fasting, and sacrifice, the Lord responded mightily (see vv. 4-11). In the same place where, in their sinful state, the people had suffered defeat, they gained victory, and thus Samuel set up a monument in honor of the Lord’s help—a stone (pillar) which he named Ebenezer (“stone of help,” see 4:1; 7:12). The emblem represented thanksgiving for the God’s help up to that point (or place) but also recognized the need for such in the future. We sometimes sing the song “O Thou Fount of Every Blessing” which includes the phrase, “Here I raise my Ebenezer: / Hither by Thy help I’ve come.” Indeed, where we are and wherever we may go must be by the gracious help of the Lord. This Sunday, whether we sing the hymn or not, let’s raise our “Ebenezers” in recognition of the mighty victory we have received (and continue to receive) through Jesus Christ.

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, November 14

“You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears” (2 Sam. 7:22).

God is unlimited, unparalleled, and unique! What is truly amazing, then, is the fact that the Lord takes special interest in us, choosing and even exalting us (see 2 Sam. 7:23-24). We may, therefore, in view of the majesty and mercy of God, confidently approach Him, asking Him to confirm His promises to us and showing our love for Him in reverent worship (see vv. 25-29). (Worship is a response to the attributes and assurances of God; it would do us good to look for both of these in our daily reading of Scripture, especially in preparation for worship.) This Sunday, we have the privilege of coming together to hear more about God and to respond in worship. Let's not miss an opportunity to assemble with other Christians in simple, heartfelt expressions of love for God. Why? Because He is great; there is none like Him; there is no God besides Him.

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, November 21

“So [Ahaziah] served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger, according to all that his father had done” (1 Kgs. 22:53).

The period of the divided kingdom is an dark and turbulent time in the history of God’s people, Israel and Judah. Some kings are good; most are not. The Israeli king Ahaziah is one of the latter. Reigning only two years, he does just as his father (Ahab) before him, practicing evil—especially the sin of idolatry—and causing his people to follow his example (see 1 Kgs. 22:52). This infuriates God! The Lord is not eager to be angry—in fact, He is extremely patient—but He can be provoked. When people—especially His own people—begin worshiping anything or anyone but Him, His wrath sparks and burns. For Ahaziah, his sin results in death (see 2 Kgs. 1:1ff), and for Israel, eventually, exile. They serve as examples for us today (see 1 Cor. 10:6-7, 11). We must make a decision, serve and worship ___ (fill-in-the-blank, “Baal,” “Allah,” “Mammon,” “Self”), or serve and worship God. This Sunday we have an opportunity to give ourselves 100% to the Lord—singing to Him, praying to Him, communing with Him; will we do so? or will we provoke Him to anger? The choice should be obvious; let’s bring God joy!

WORSHIP MATTERS

Friday, December 5

“When [Naaman] returned to the man of God [Elisha] with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, ‘Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now’” (2 Kgs. 5:15).

What a powerful testimony! Naaman, having been graciously and miraculously cured of a life-threatening illness, returned to honor God. He came to where he knew God’s presence was—in Israel and with His prophet; he acknowledged his newfound faith in the presence of all; and he unashamedly confessed, in no uncertain terms, that there is only one God—the God of Israel. Similarly, this is what we will do on Sunday; we will enter into the presence of God with His people to boldly confess our faith in the one and only God. Though that may appear foolish and intolerant to some, our love for the Lord compels us to come together to thank and praise Him; and if unbelievers attend, our worship may cause them to “see” Him for the first time and declare that there is a God and that He is certainly among us (see 1 Cor. 14:25). Let’s prepare now by considering all that the Lord has done for us—especially the spiritual healing He has provided through His Son Jesus Christ!

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, December 12

“Glory in His holy name; let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad” (1 Chron. 16:10).

There was unusual excitement in Israel. David, accompanied by a great procession of praise, was finally bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. A special tent had been erected to house the Ark, burnt offerings and peace offerings had been made to God, Levites had been assigned new ministries of celebration, thanksgiving, and praise, and David, Asaph, and Asaph’s brothers sang a psalm of thanksgiving. What a joyous occasion! It is difficult to imagine anyone at that time wearing a frown or a scowl on his or her face; smiles and laughter must certainly have abounded—perhaps especially as the singers shouted “let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad.” Though there must always be a spirit of reverence in our worship, this does not imply that our assemblies ought to be sedated or grim; it is indeed sad—even discouraging—when some Christians—though most probably unintentionally—glaze over or even frown during the singing, preaching, etc. This Sunday, if our heart is happy to be worshiping the Lord, let’s make sure our faces reflect it. As that “theological masterpiece” of a children’s song says it, “If you’re happy and you know it, ‘Praise the Lord.’ / If you’re happy and you know it, ‘Praise the Lord.’ / If you’re happy and you know it, / Then your face will surely show it. / If you’re happy and you know it, ‘Praise the Lord.’”

WORSHIP MATTERS
Friday, December 19

“For in the eighth year of [Josiah’s] reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images” (2 Chron. 34:3).

It has been said concerning those of us who are parents that “each day of our lives we make deposits in the memory banks of our children.” We might add also that the way in which we invest spiritually in our kids will determine the spiritual return—so we must be careful. Yet, parents who capitalize on spiritual opportunities, such as Bible classes and assemblies for worship, can expect to see great spiritual profits. Children should never be written off as non-participants at church (or, worse, as mere distractions); they are capable of great things! Josiah, for example, was most likely mentored by godly men and women when he took the throne of Judah at eight years old, but by the age of 16, he took the initiative himself to seek the Lord and was leading a national, spiritual revolution at 20! Parents, let’s not become discouraged from coming to Bible classes and assemblies, because it’s hard to get the family ready, or because our children misbehave, or because we don’t get to fully participate while taking care of our kids, or because our teenagers are rebelling against us; we are doing what God desires of us—teaching our children to seek the Lord, to become His disciples. So, let’s not give up, and, if possible, let’s be at Bible class and worship this Sunday with our family. We may be raising the next Josiah!

WORSHIP MATTERS

Friday, January 2

“The good hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances of Israel” (Ezra 7:9-10).

Over and over Ezra concludes that his success was due to the fact that “the hand of the Lord [his] God [was] upon [him]” (see Ezra 7:6, 9, 14, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). Though obviously an anthropomorphism—a literary device which attributes human characteristics to non-human entities—the hand of the Lord represents the gracious, all-powerful nature of God demonstrated in His providence. It bestows good (see 8:22). It encourages (see 7:28). It rescues (see 8:31). However, while God does work in the lives of the good and the evil, He shows special care to all who, like Ezra, prepare themselves. As we begin 2015, we need to set our hearts (i.e. prioritize) (1) study, (2) practice, and (3) instruction, if we desire the hand of the Lord to be upon us. Though these should be daily goals, we have special opportunities each Sunday (and Wednesday) to learn more in Bible classes and in the assemblies, to be stimulated by other Christians to practice (e.g. “love and good deeds”), and to be better equipped to share our faith with others (or even to teach classes or preach in the assemblies). It’s all worth it! If we set our heart on God, God will set His hand upon us.