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## Are We Responsible for Enjoying Prayer, Worship, and Bible Reading?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether we're responsible for enjoying prayer, worship, and Bible reading or it's up to God to ignite those joys in us and whether sharing about things that cause grief, pain, or discontent is a form of complaining.

\* Are we responsible for enjoying prayer, worship, and reading the Bible, or is it up to God to ignite those joys in us?

\* Is it okay for Christians to share about things that cause grief, pain, or discontent, or is that a form of complaining?

### Transcript

This is Stand to Reason, hashtag STRask Podcast. I'm Amy Hall, and I have with me today, Greg Koukl. As you have virtually every time we do the show.

Surprise, surprise. Yes. Thought I'd join you today.

And I make Greg answer the question first, and once he gets all the heavy lifting done, then I throw some things in. You Trump it all with something really profound. So... Alright, so this first question comes from James.

James. James, are we responsible for enjoying prayer, worship, and reading the Bible, or is it up to God to ignite those joys in us? I'm struggling to enjoy all of these, and it's sapping my motivation to do them and making it tedious and discouraging when I try. Well, you told me before the show started, we'd start with an easy one.

And then we defined easy. Well, this is a hard one. It's a hard one, I think, because I think the affective element of our relationship with God that is influenced by certain behaviors or disciplines that are part of our life is a hard one to manage.

I think a lot of it depends on temperament. It also depends on stage in life. That is, when

things are... It's funny how circumstances affect things.

Sometimes when things are going really great, it's hard to pray. And sometimes when things are going really bad, it's hard to pray, you know, and vice versa. So, circumstances change, and so do our kind of affective responses to these kinds of things change.

And I think both... Sometimes it is a practice of prayer and Bible reading that brings... I don't know if joy is the right word. I have a hard time figuring out what joy is anyway, biblically speaking, because it's not the same as happiness, it's not circumstantial, but it's got to be something emotional and affective. And I don't get that, just saying.

But I do have a satisfaction being before God. Here's part of the reason is because James says you have not because you have not. And so, if I'm facing challenges in my own life or there are other people that are facing challenges in their life, that I have agreed to pray for or committed to pray for at least for a season regarding that issue, then I know that once I've prayed thoughtfully regarding those things, then I'm done.

It's up to God now. Now, if he doesn't act, it's not because I didn't ask. It's because of something else.

Okay? And so, there is a level of satisfaction I have of just praying these prayers and knowing that I've done what I could do. And if I'm praying for something personal, which it's much easier for me to pray for, something that's troubling me in a relationship that's meaningful to me, then I do get a sense of relief and satisfaction, I wouldn't call it joy, but a sense of relief and satisfaction of erring my concerns before God. And I do this on a regular basis, not just when I'm having prayer time, like if I'm not traveling or whatever, I get up the morning and then I sit in my office in my leather wing chair, you know, whatever they call that.

And I have my time with the Lord, or if I'm driving or maybe on the plane or whatever quietly, I'll just pretend like I'm sleeping or whatever. Then when I bring these things before God that are anguishing my soul, I feel better about having talked it out with him a little bit and having expressed my frustrations or desires or anguish or confusion or discouragement before the one who could actually do something about it if he wanted to, if he willed to do that. Remember the person who addressed Jesus, if you will, you can make me well.

Jesus said, in that case, I'm willing, but I don't know that he's always willing, but I can make my request. So all I could say is, for me, it's a combination of discipline and satisfaction. And sometimes I don't know what God's job is and all of this.

I don't know that he's joy is a fruit of the spirit. So that identifies that some of these things love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kind of gentleness, faithfulness, self-control,

the fruits of the spirit from what Jesus said in Romans 5, these are fruits of the spirit. So the spirit has a role in producing these things in our lives, but I don't know exactly how that works.

It just says that's the role. I have for many years prayed specifically about three different fruits of the spirit of my life, patience, gentleness, and self-control that I think actually, over the years, have improved in my life because of that prayer, but it takes a long time. You know, I've just started praying about the joy stuff on occasion.

Maybe I should pray for that more. But to me, these are part of the Christian life. It's part of what I do as a follower of Jesus.

It's part of what I do in relationship with Jesus. I'm married too. And there are things that I do in virtue of the fact that I'm married, not because I'm following my emotions in the moment or something good is going to happen to me and befall me and I'm going to feel as a result of doing this.

I do it out of a sense of obligation, duty, and fulfilling a promise. And that's the right thing to do. And sometimes I feel great.

Sometimes I don't feel so great in that circumstance. So I'm not exactly sure how to answer this, except with what I've said. There's not a, I don't think there's a secret here.

I don't worry about God's role in things. I've talked about our sanctification as a hundred percent God, a hundred percent man, meaning God has a hundred percent responsibility for the things that he can do that applies to evangelism too. And I have a hundred percent responsibility for the things that I can do.

And so what I try to focus in on is are the things that I could do to come before the Lord. And there are lots of, you know, rejoice always. And everything gives thanks for this is God's will for your Christ Jesus.

First, that's five. So that's something I get okay. Rejoicing always is very hard for me right now.

Has been for a long time because there are things that have I've labored with. And, but I still, you know, smile more, put in a happy face, you know, put on your game face kind of thing. It does help and be thankful.

Look at the things to be thankful for instead of grumbling about the things you could be that bother you. I mean, these are things that scripture describes as my responsibilities that do have an effect, an impact on my, my affect of state of mind, my feelings and my approach to things, my outlook on life. And to do those things, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute.

If there's anything, any excellence or anything worthy of praise. Paul says, what Philippians three, let your mind dwell on these things. So how do I know that verse so well? I didn't try to memorize it.

I just read it a lot because I'm trying to remind myself of what I'm supposed to be doing in terms of my thought life. So a whole bunch of this is a discipline. You do it because it's good for you.

And sometimes you have an immediate awareness of the benefits and sometimes the benefits are in a character that's formed by good spiritual habits over time. And sometimes, and what God does in there is what God does. He's involved in it all.

So I don't dichotomize it. Over time we're putting deposits in the account of character, of knowing God. There are a bunch of things that change in us as we are reading and praying.

And again, I can look back over time and maybe not every single day was was incredible experience. But over time you are learning more about who God is. You are trusting him more.

You are every day a little bit, you know, you're, you're, as you pray. Sometimes you'll see a dramatic answer and sometimes you won't. But it's all, it's all going to pay off.

It's, it's all being put into that account over time and you can look back over the years and see how God has shaped you. You know, I'm sorry. No, go ahead.

I'll continue after you interrupt me. I, this notion of, of, of depositing it in an account is very, very real and significant for me. Because it says in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, momentary light affliction, and Paul is using these words in comparison to eternity.

The, what amounts to momentary and light affliction in this life compared to what we, we gain. He says in Romans that I, I don't count the sufferings of this life in any way comparison to the glory that is to follow. Okay.

So he's got things in proper perspective there, but momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. So we look now at things that are visible, but the things that are invisible, the things that are visible in parishing, the things that are invisible are eternal. That's Paul's statement there.

I know, again, I know this just from constant reflection on it and accounting it for my own life. So, you know, in our, our four score in 10 here, you know, this is, this is what we have to build up those proverbial treasures in heaven. And, and what we endure for Christ's sake in a godly fashion in this, in this lifetime does accrue to benefit in the future.

I think about my spiritual 401k or whatever, you know, this is not wasted. This isn't the time necessarily to enjoy the fruits of it. I'd like to be enjoying certain fruits of things now and not wait till later.

But even so, for some, some people, God has asked for more later than now. And my sense is that when he does ask that, Hebrews 11 talks about those receiving a great, a better resurrection. There is going to be a better resurrection for some.

And that's because of the way things have worked out in this life. We others will have a greater balance in the account, so to speak. And that's why Paul says to Timothy, physical exercise profits, that kind of a little, but godliness is a means of great gain, not only for this life.

So there's a benefit in this life of godliness, but also for the life to come. So those who develop godliness in this life get a benefit not just for now, but that it has ramifications for the future, which ramifications you wouldn't have if you didn't store it up on this side, even though you still go to heaven. Okay.

Now, how to conceptualize that all accurate? I don't know, but that dynamic certainly is a biblical one and it's a play and I rest on that so often when things get really challenging for me. So I want to give an analogy of how maybe to think about this because it. I don't know what you're expecting from all of these times of prayer worship and reading the Bible, but maybe you can think about it this way.

Are our souls, they need these things just like we need to eat. Now, eating is something you do every day. Some of the meals you're going to remember, some of the meals you're not going to remember.

However, over time and each day it was necessary for you to survive and to grow and to do all sorts of everything that you do. Well, in the same way, if you are praying and you're reading your Bible and you're worshiping, some days they'll be memorable and some days won't be memorable. But if you think of it in terms of this is absolutely necessary for my soul so that I do not starve, then maybe it'll be you'll take the pressure off yourself looking for some sort of big, big experience.

And I also say, if I haven't been doing those things for a while, whenever I start up again, it is really hard and I don't know why that is not only inertia of rest. So not only starting up, if I haven't been doing it at all, but even each day as I start, sometimes I feel this resistance where I put it off or I let myself do that, sometimes I'll miss a day. But if I just say, if I get into the habit and then habits are always easier to keep up than starting a new habit, but if I go in there and I read, I'm never sorry I've done it.

I always, there's something about it that is, it feels as if you were hungry and then you ate, even if it isn't some dramatic, exciting thing. But I just, I encourage you to push

through that resistance. I think that's just our fallenness.

And sometimes maybe we, we don't want to open up to God for whatever reason. Maybe you could ask Him why. Maybe you could ask Him for help.

But the more that you can develop a habit the same time of day, the same place, whatever it is, it's so much easier to just step into that than when you're doing it all sorts of different times. Right, right. Some people don't have, have a schedule that allows that I don't actually because of my travel and host of other things, but nevertheless I still can develop consistency.

I spent, when I go to bed, I have an evening prayer time too. Now, sometimes it's 60 seconds, sometimes it's 5, 6, 7 minutes. Maybe longer if I'm anguished about something, you know, and I, sometimes I take a knee next to my bed.

I don't always do that at home just because I don't want to look like I'm putting on airs if somebody walks in. But I want to review the day and thank God for the things that He did that day that were good. It's Coram Deo.

It's before the Lord. You know, I've written a mentoring letter about that recently and just kind of closing things off and then the things that are heavy on my heart. That's when I pray about the things heavy on my heart.

So I close the day off and then I generally read Psalm. I have a little, you know, legacy Bible. Somebody sent me.

I don't know. I got it in the mail from Psalm. I don't know who sent it, but I get these things.

So I have a little leather legacy, NASB. It says Yahweh instead of Lord, which is a little odd, but that's what the word is in the Hebrew, but I'm not quite used to that. In any event, I just read through these Psalms and mark things that are emotionally satisfying to me.

So that's a little more stable part of my day because everybody goes to bed, you know, and I try to spend a little time with the Lord there. If I don't, especially when we had reality, for example, we had early calls every morning, just about. And it's challenging.

And so it isn't like I'd pop out of bed. Oh, I got to be at this event at seven in the morning. So I better get up.

It's five in the morning, you know, and have my prayer. That doesn't happen. My quiet times in mornings like that are very quiet.

So anyway, you have to adapt to your own lifestyle, what that looks like, but you can't just like meals. This is a good point. You can't, you have to continue to feed yourself in

some fashion on a regular basis spiritually, or you're going to starve.

All right, let's squeeze in one more question from worldview cafe. Is it okay for Christians to complain to share about things that cause grief, pain, discontent, or is this more about attitude? Are sharing needs a form of complaint? Can we complain and be content? Another easy one. Thanks, Amy.

Well, I'll just say quite candidly that one of my vices is complaining and my family doesn't like it and I don't like it. Sometimes I can't help it because there's so much to complain about, you know. So, but that's not a justification.

A reason is not an excuse. And I have to, for the sake of others, I have to be careful and not taint the atmosphere around me. And that's a struggle for me much of the time.

Now, in a certain way, I found a way of making a living at it, you know. Finding things wrong. I can speak to it to correct or whatever, but it's funny how God does that.

But I think that complaining, though, there is a place for it in moderation because when you share difficulties that you're going through in life with someone else, you are, I don't know why you're unhappy about dissatisfied with and it bothers you and it hurts you. And I think we do need to talk about this. But we may end up just getting into a victim syndrome and focusing more on that than on what we ought to be focusing on the giving thanks, complaining is the opposite of being thankful.

So if we're to be thankful, the more we're complaining, the less thankful we are. And though I'm not against all complaints because we need to share in community our concerns things that we're going through emotionally. Sometimes we do that with God.

Sometimes we do with that with others and others who can come around us and encourage us to build us up and offer us advice or maybe even chastise us. I mean, faithful are the wounds of a friend. Sometimes we need to be told that part of the problem is us by someone who has visibility and can do so in a gracious way in a kind and loving way.

So I have mixed feelings about this notion. I think there is a place for raising issues and sharing things, but I think it can easily get out of hand. Nobody likes to be around someone who complains a lot.

I think I wouldn't call all sharing of bad things to be complaining. I think we know what the difference is. I think we know when we cross over from here is something that has hurt me or I'm struggling with and I need prayer for it.

I need comfort or whatever. And then just complaining about everything that's not exactly right. Like I hate it when I get questions like this.

I had blessed it. There is a qualitative difference, I think, I think about the Psalms and I would call them laments. I wouldn't call them complaints when they're hurting or when they're crying out to God.

13, how long will you deserve? Yeah, see that feels different to me than somebody who is complaining where maybe it's I don't know if it's just a level of things or there's just an attitude of kind of a settled dissatisfaction defeatist. I don't know. I'm not sure.

Cranky. I feel like we know the difference, but maybe that's a terrible answer because they're asking what the difference is. If it's okay to complain.

I think it's okay to share about things that cause grief pain and discontent, but I don't think we should complain. I think it makes things worse for us. But where that line is, I think we... Well, certainly vigilance is required.

Yeah. Sorry, I don't have a better answer for you. Worldview Cafe.

I mean, again, I just go back to the fact that we let ourselves be shaped by the wisdom of God's Word and we get better at these things, these difficult questions, we get better at, we get... They become more natural inclinations for us in the sense that we can see the difference better. You know, what's that verse where they... I'm drawing a blank, but I know there's a verse about it. You do this to me, Amy.

Stop that. The verse about renewing our minds that we know what the will of God is. Yeah.

So we, when our mind is shaped in, to be like Christ and to be wise, we become better at making these decisions and recognizing what is good and what is bad in making the right decisions. Now, Proverbs says a cheerful heart doeth good like a medicine. No, I'm not sure if that's other people's cheerful heart is medicinal for us or our own cheerful heart is medicinal for us, but nevertheless it does speak to this issue.

Well, thank you, James and World View Cafe. If you'd like to send us your questions, send it on Twitter with the hashtag SDRAsk or go to our website at SDR.org. All you have to do is find our hashtag SDRAsk podcast page. Which is really hard.

It really bugs me because I can't find that when I'm trying to find it anyway. Are you serious? I'm just complaining. Okay, I get it.

So if you can't find it, go to podcast and then choose hashtag SDRAsk. And you'll find a link there and we'd love to hear from you because we always, we, we'd love to have as many questions as we can to choose from. So I can find things that I think people will be asking and we just want to help you think more clearly about all of these things.

And the more you listen and the more you practice in your own mind, the better you'll



get. Amy doesn't get my gallows humor so my dark side here. But that's all it was.

Well, thank you for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Hochl for a stand to reason.