



Staff Devotions

Devotion 1: One True God

For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Psalm 86:10

Imagine the confusion. Four hundred fifty prophets of Baal are limping about their altar, crying out and asking for their god to answer them by fire. The answer they receive? Utter silence. No response. They're doing everything they can to show their sincerity, to the point of harming themselves, and their god seemingly doesn't care. The confusion and desperation must have been palpable as the hours dragged on.

Then the scene shifts to Elijah. The odds are against him—450 to 1. Baal has 450 prophets desperately interceding beside a dry altar. The Lord has just Elijah and a sopping-wet altar. Yet, with the odds stacked against him, Elijah's simple prayer of faith gives us a glimpse into how God-focused he was: He asks that the Lord answer by fire so that the people may know who is God. He is zealous for God's glory and for the people to see that there is no contest between God and Baal. It's not as if there were two good options in the final "god matchup" and he didn't really know who would win. It's not like commentators couldn't agree on who was the better god. No, when Yahweh shows up, there is no contest. All competition is blown away. In fact, there is no competition. He alone is God.

In many ways, our culture is similar to what Elijah encountered. Instead of Baal, we have idols of all types—from the literal idols of Hinduism and Buddhism to the heart idols that people worship, like success, money, or romance. As one Christian figure wrote, our hearts tend to be idol factories (Calvin). We today still need the truth Elijah demonstrated in ancient times—the Lord alone is worthy of our worship and allegiance, and loving him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength is the only way to find peace and meaning in this chaotic, idol-filled world. Metaphorically, we will limp along as the prophets of Baal did until we bow the knee to the one true God.

As we share the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal with the children under our care today, let's remind ourselves that the God of Elijah who answered by fire is the same God yesterday, today, and forever. We too serve the God who is there and who isn't silent (Schaeffer). In a world that is peppered with confusion about who has the final authority in our lives and where truth can be found, this is an immense comfort: The one true God is alive and well, and he is still at work in our world. We can pray like Elijah that the people in our spheres of influence would know that he alone is God. Consider the words of the hymn "God Only Wise" by Walter Chalmers Smith in 1867 as you prepare your heart to serve the Lord today.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render, O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.



Devotion 2: Three-in-One God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14

What do water, a three-leaf clover, and an egg all have in common? Did you guess it? All three have been used as analogies of the Trinity, and all three are gravely mistaken in their explanations of such a complex doctrine.

Psalms 145:3 tells us that God's greatness is unsearchable. Perhaps the place we most feel the truth of these words is in the doctrine of the Trinity. One God in three persons? What exactly does that mean? Today, we will uncover passages of Scripture that reveal the three persons of the Godhead who are all distinct, yet entirely unified in one coequal, coeternal divine essence.

What do we mean by coequal? This means that the three persons of the Trinity are all equally God. The Father is not the supreme God, with the Son and Holy Spirit merely following him as subordinates. Instead, they are equal in their divine standing and authority. We see Jesus submit his will to the Father when he prays in the garden of Gethsemane, but that act was not because Jesus was a lesser version of God. He willingly laid down his life.

What about coeternal? Some cults have claimed that the Son is a created being and that he is not eternal in the same way the Father is. That is a heresy. Jesus himself refers to his eternal essence by saying, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). He is the self-sufficient one who has no beginning. We could point to many more scriptures that confirm the truth of the Son's eternal nature.

When teaching the children in your church today, take care to avoid common misconceptions about the Trinity. One prevalent misconception is called modalism. Modalism is the view that God is a single being who manifests himself as the Father, Son, and Spirit in the same way that one man could be a father, a husband, and a son all at the same time. This was denounced as a heresy in the third century AD, but it is still unwittingly used by many well-meaning Bible teachers when they try to explain the Trinity. The Bible is clear upon close study that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all distinct persons. Today's Bible lesson highlights the baptism of Jesus, where we see the Son in the water, the Spirit descending as a dove, and the

Father speaking from heaven. They are also completely unified—one with each other—as one true God, not three.

In a day and age when people worship all kinds of gods of their own making, it is of utmost importance that we rightly understand who we are worshipping when we say we believe in the God of the Bible. We need to be faithful to what the Scriptures reveal about this holy, mysterious, yet knowable God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Even though there is much about our triune God that is mysterious, we can let the wonder of who he is usher us into praise like Paul: "Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Romans 11:33). As you prepare to serve the Lord today, take a moment to worship our triune God through the words of the hymn "Come, Thou Almighty King."

Come, Thou Incarnate Word,
gird on Thy mighty sword,
our pray'r attend:
come, and Thy people bless,
and give Thy Word success:
Spirit of holiness,
on us descend.

Come, Holy Comforter,
Thy sacred witness bear
in this glad hour:
Thou who almighty art,
now rule in every heart,
and ne'er from us depart,
Spirit of pow'r.

To Thee, great One in Three,
eternal praises be
hence, evermore.
His sov'reign majesty
may we in glory see,
and to eternity
love and adore!



Devotion 3: One Rescuer

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

What might a devout Christian and a devout atheist like Richard Dawkins have in common? Both believe in the historical reality of Jesus Christ. Most atheistic scholars believe along with Christians that an exceptional man named Jesus really did live and die in the first century AD.

So what we have to ask ourselves is what do we believe about who this Jesus was? He lived. He died. But was he who he said he was? Was he really God in the flesh? Did he come back from the dead? And is he actually alive forevermore, ruling and reigning at the right hand of God the Father?

In many ways, the idea of God coming down to mankind is unthinkable. Ponder for a second what you know about the religions of the world. Do any of them have a divine figure who descends to earth to live and die a substitutionary death for their creation? No. Christianity is the only religion where, instead of man working his way up to God, God comes down to man to rescue him. But rescue him from what?

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, sin has driven a wedge between God and his creation. Because of sin, mankind lost unfettered access to the Holy One. Instead, as we see in the Old Testament law, the only way to approach the Lord was by bringing the blood of something innocent and pure. Since ancient times, blood signaled that forgiveness could occur and peace with God could be had. However, you couldn't bring your own blood since you weren't sinless. Only by the blood of a blameless creature, often a lamb, were you given access, given a relationship with the one true God.

As the Lamb of God, Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system and the answer to Eden's sin problem. His blood was shed on the cross to allow his people to be forgiven of their sins and given access to the

Holy One again, like Adam and Eve had before sin entered the world. Now all who approach God, having repented and accepted Jesus' atonement for their sins by his perfect life, death, and resurrection, can have an eternal, transformative relationship with the one true God.

As we share this good news with the children under our care today, let's remember to never personally lose sight of Jesus and never get over what Jesus did for us. Take a moment to praise the Lamb of God, using the words of the hymn "Jesus Paid It All" written by Elvina Hall in 1865.

I hear the Savior say,
"Thy strength indeed is small,
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all."

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy pow'r and Thine alone,
Can change the leper's spots
And melt the heart of stone.

For nothing good have I
Where-by Thy grace to claim;
I'll wash my garments white
In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb.

And when, before the throne,
I stand in Him complete,
"Jesus died my soul to save,"
My lips shall still repeat.



Devotion 4: One Loving Father

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 1 John 4:16

Ponder for a second what predominant image comes to mind when you think of God. Do you imagine a disapproving glare? A reluctant, but resigned-to-forgive benefactor? Or do you imagine a Father with a heart so bursting with love that an ocean of unmerited favor flows from his heart toward you?

Even with the best teaching and upbringing, it can be hard to remedy the faulty views of God that we have. It's easy to be so accustomed to earning favor that we think God must be continually disappointed in us. We forget that we stand before him completely by grace. By definition, grace is undeserved favor. Truly, it's never been about earning his approval, or the Scriptures wouldn't say, "By grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8).

The story we get to share with the children under our care today gives us a beautiful, refreshing glimpse into the gracious heart of the one true God. In today's parable, Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son, a man who didn't deserve any special treatment after his foolish and untrustworthy behavior.

Yet the father in the story shocks us by how he treats his undeserving son. First, we learn that the father has been watching for his wayward child. While the son is a long way off, the father spots him. Clearly, his son has been on his heart since the day he left, and the father has been yearning for his homecoming, for his repentance, from the beginning. Next, the father runs. This dignified master of the house runs toward the son who has shamed the family. There is no standoffishness here. There is no disapproving glare. There is no concern for what the neighbors think or if his clothes will be ruined by the dirt path. Instead, there is complete joy at the repentance of a beloved child. The welcome home sign is rolled out, and joy and celebration abound.

Do we live as people who really believe God feels this way toward his children? Have you personally taken to heart the Bible's portrayal of our God as the kind of Father

who loves to lavish his children with more than they deserve at the first moment of their repentance? Take a moment to worship the Lord for his tender lovingkindness toward you as you meditate on the words of the hymn "The Love of God" written by Frederick M. Lehman in 1917.

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled
And pardoned from his sin.

O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.

When hoary time shall pass away,
And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall;
When men who here refuse to pray,
On rocks and hills and mountains call;
God's love, so sure, shall still endure,
All measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race—
The saints' and angels' song.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.



Devotion 5: One Life Mission

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." John 14:23

An epidemic of loneliness—that is how some experts have described Western culture in our post-Covid world. Young people report acute feelings of meaninglessness in their lives, a sense of feeling like their existence is pointless.

It's sad, isn't it?

Yet the good news is that life in the kingdom of God was never meant to be meaningless, pointless, or lonely. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Christ said he came that we might "have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). When you come to the Lord, you are given an identity as his child, a community to love and be loved by (the church), and a life-changing mission to live for. Truly, new life in him is the opposite of meaningless and lonely—it's abundant!

On our last day of VBS, children will learn about this meaningful, life-changing mission God's people have been given to love the Lord with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength. But what exactly does that mean? In essence, Jesus is saying that your whole being is to be completely devoted to delighting in and obeying God. You are to have a comprehensive love for him, where no compartment of your existence is shielded from God's rule and reign.

Before we buckle under the weight of feeling like such a life-altering command is merely another burden to bear, consider the nature of God. God is the Creator and the one who knows all things. As such, he knows what makes his creatures flourish, much like an inventor knows exactly how to make his invention best work. According to God's design for humanity, a meaningful life isn't made up of status, money, or possessions. Instead, if you want to live a meaningful life, love God with everything in you; for until your life is centered around this one goal, you will never find true joy or peace. As Augustine wrote in his famous prayer, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." So instead of thinking, "Oh great, another rule to follow and fail at keeping," remember that what God is calling you to is actually

a life of abundant delight in him. As the psalmist says, "At [his] right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). In short, the greatest commandment is immensely good for us because this is exactly what we were made for.

Consider what life could look like if your predominant prayer for yourself became that you might love the Lord more fully this year than you ever have before. Perhaps try praying that now. The Lord loves to give good gifts to his children, and the best gift is knowing and loving God himself.

As you finish out your VBS week, take a moment to praise the Lord for the life he has given you in Christ, using the words of the hymn "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" written by Joachim Neander in 1680.

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!

All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near,
Join me in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,
Shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!

Hast thou not seen how thy desires e'er have been
Granted in what He ordaineth?

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee!

Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee;
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do
If with His love He befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him!

Let the amen sound from His people again;
Gladly forever adore Him.