

WORSHIP HELPS

AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

INTRODUCTION

In his book, "An Audience of One", RT Kendall tells the following story:

I will never forget a story I heard years ago. A young prodigy – a pianist – gave his first concert at the Royal Festival Hall in London. His reputation preceded him; the concert was sold out on the first day tickets were available. When he finished his final piece, the crowd went wild. They spontaneously stood to their feet as they shouted and cheered. The young pianist bowed quickly and hurried off stage, but the audience was begging for him to come back. The stage manager whispered to him: "Go quickly – they are yelling for you."

The young man didn't move. Instead he peered through a crack in the curtain, anxiously scanning the gathering. "No, I can't go out there," he said. The stage manager's response was bordering on annoyance: "Look, son, they are on their feet – trust me, they don't do this for everybody – go out and enjoy it." The boy continued to scan the audience. Finally the stage manager cracked and shouted: "Get out there! They are all standing for you."

The young man looked back at him and whispered: "They are not all standing. Do you see that old man in the last row from the back? He's not standing, he is still seated."

"Who cares about one old man?" said the stage manager. The boy answered with a steely determination: "I care. That's my teacher. When he stands I can take that bow."

The onlookers were still cheering. Two thousand people were applauding the sheer magic of his skill. But the young musician knew in his heart that none of that mattered unless his teacher – his mentor – approved. He wasn't playing for an audience of thousands. In truth, he was playing for an audience of one.

For the young man in this story, he was not interested in the thousands of people in the hall, he only had eyes for one person, his teacher, and his focus was on him. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to certain individuals; they became the focus of his attention.

- Mary Magdalene outside the tomb – John 20, verses 10 to 18
- The disciples of the Emmaus Road – Luke 24, verses 13 to 35
- Doubting Thomas in the locked room – John 20, verses 24 to 31
- Peter on the shore – John 21

Choose one of these scripture passages above, read it again for yourself, see how Jesus gives his attention to the individuals concerned.

PRAYERS:

As Jesus journeyed toward the cross, he never lost sight of you and me. His love for us and his dedication to God's saving plan kept him focused. He did not let himself get distracted.

In Hebrews Chapter 3 it tells us: "fix your thoughts on Jesus." With these words God is asking us to think very carefully about Jesus, to focus our attention on him. That can sometimes be easier said than done. We struggle with focus, we are easily distracted. We think about so many things during the day that must get done. We dwell on decisions that must be made, concerns we have and we bounce from one thing to the next. Somewhere, we lose sight of Jesus. We lose our focus on the One who truly matters.

Richard Foster in his Christian classic, uses the 'palms down, palms up' exercise to focus our attention on Jesus. Simply place your hands on your knees and think of all the matters occupying your thoughts at the present time. As each thing comes to mind, tap your knee and release the concern to God. When you can think of nothing else turn your hands over so that your palms are facing upward as a symbol of your desire to receive from God and focus on Jesus. At the end of your quiet time, join in with this prayer:

Lord Jesus,
Like the disciples walking the road to Emmaus,
we are in need of your company!
Jesus, stand among us, in your risen power,
let this time of worship, be a hallowed hour
where you are at the centre of it all.
Open our eyes to see you walking beside us,
protecting us, encouraging us, loving us.
We pray this in your name.
Amen

READ JOHN 20: 19 - 31

- On appearing in the locked room, Jesus twice says to his disciples, "Peace be with you". What do you think are the significance of these words?
- Most of us have long associated Thomas with doubt, even bestowing the label of "Doubting Thomas" on those who raise questions about doctrines or traditions of the church. Some commentaries go as far as to label Thomas as "faithless." Is this a fair portrayal?
- Faith is a practice. We travel this journey in faith. Doubt travels with us. So how can we learn from its discomforts? What does doubt teach you?
- How does this example of Thomas – not just in his doubts, but in the courage, the questions, and the actions – speak to you about your own journey?
- Thomas was unimpressed when the other disciples told him with great excitement that they had seen the Lord. At times, we all try to impress others and seek their approval. Who are you trying to impress? How important is for you to gain the approval of others?

READ PSALM 86

In the Psalms, David expresses his desire to worship God and glorify Him in all that he does. Through all the ups and downs of David's life, he kept coming back to his humble desire to seek to please God above all else. David lived with the 'audience of one' mindset.

David recognised that God was at work and that he was privileged to be part of that work. When we see ourselves as instruments in the hands of God, it helps us focus our attention on pleasing Him. He then becomes the only audience that matters.

Exercise: consider and acknowledge all the great things that God is already doing around you. How are you and how can you be a part of those works?

God has invited you to join Him in His work today. He is in your audience, seek only His approval. Remind yourself throughout the day to keep your priority on pleasing God through all you do and say.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Today, General Brian Peddle has issued a call to prayer to the worldwide Salvation Army, urging people to pray into the current coronavirus situation with urgency. His call to pray can be found on video at:

<https://vimeo.com/salvationarmyihq>

and more prayer resources are available at:

<https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/covid19-prayer>

The General's call cover's five areas:

PRAY TO LAMENT

Think of the loss of life, the pain caused to families and friends, the cancelled opportunities and loneliness caused by isolation.

PRAY FOR THOSE IN NEED

Pray for different groups of people who will struggle in these days e.g. the hungry, those who have lost income, the sick, the lonely.

PRAY FOR AN ARMY OF ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Give thanks for how God is using the Army to meet needs around the world and to make a difference in communities. Pray for strength, good health and wisdom for Salvation Army volunteers, members and officers.

PRAY FOR AN END TO THE VIRUS

Recognise God's power. Cry out to him for his mighty hand to slow down and stop the progress of the coronavirus. Pray for a decline in its spread, for a vaccine, for economic justice, for healing.

PRAY FOR HOPE AND JOY TO BE RESTORED

Pray for all those in your community and around the world who are feeling down and who are struggling to process the situation that the world finds itself in. Think of a person or household who may be particularly struggling at this time. Take time to send them an encouraging message by phone or email.

Think also of reasons to be thankful! For many of us, there are plenty of reasons around if we take time to find them, from family and friends to technology.

Let us pray to God,
who alone makes us dwell in safety:

For all who are affected by coronavirus,
through illness or isolation or anxiety,
that they may find relief and recovery:

**Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.**

For those who are guiding our nation at this time,
and shaping national policies,
that they may make wise decisions:

**Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.**

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers,
that through their skill and insights
many will be restored to health:

**Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.**

For the vulnerable and the fearful,
for the gravely ill and the dying,
that they may know your comfort and peace:

**Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.**

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Taken from the Church of England website

SONG SUGGESTIONS

- Saviour, if my feet have faltered (SASB 672)
- All there is of me, Lord
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1U0E7gyWhHM>
- Open our eyes, Lord
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE3QiOwNpKk>
- Fairest Lord Jesus
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8o_2A94jsEA
- Don't doubt him now
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8o_2A94jsEA