

ATTENDANCE ON WEEK DAY SERVICES

by John Angell James

Our souls, like our gardens, need diligent and constant culture—without this, weeds grow fast, and flowers droop and wither. True religion is a business for all times, all places, and all engagements. It is intended to regulate and sanctify everything—to change the whole man into a burnt offering unto God—and the whole life into a service for Christ. There is no **place** of which we can say, "God is not here!" There is no **time** in reference to which we can affirm, "God's demands upon me are now suspended!" And no **engagement** so remote from moral obligations, that we can declare, "God takes no cognizance of this." This should be our abiding reflection,

"Within your circling power I stand,
On every side I find your hand—
Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,
I am surrounded still with God."

This *is true* religion—a solemn, devout, practical recollection and sense of the presence of God. This is what, by a most expressive and emphatic phrase, the Holy Spirit, in the language of inspiration, calls, "walking with God," which, viewed as a privilege, was not confined to Enoch and Noah; or as a duty, was not obligatory alone upon them. How holy is that man likely to be, and how happy, who, wherever he is and whatever he is doing, finds himself in the presence of the Holy One of Israel—who, however desolate and forlorn; however remote from every other friend; however perplexed with difficulty, or oppressed with care; however assailed by temptation or harassed by anxiety—has only to open the eye of faith, and to behold God near—with all the resources of infinite wisdom, power, and love.

To maintain this realizing sense of the Divine presence is one part of the design of the means of grace, and the ordinances of religion. Surrounded by objects of sense,

engaged in pursuits of business, and living in constant fellowship with our fellow creatures, how necessary is the sabbath and how important are its solemn occupations to keep alive in the soul a practical belief in God. With what difficulty, but for that blessed day, would even the renewed heart maintain a due sense of its relations and duties to God, and its dependence upon him. But alas! how soon are the impressions of the sabbath effaced, its convictions stifled, and its resolutions forgotten—amidst the returning and urgent engagements of worldly affairs. The current of secularity seems, in many cases, only dammed up for a season, to flow with greater violence when the temporary impediment is removed. Or to change the metaphor, the mind wearied by the cares of business, instead of gaining fresh strength on the sabbath for its spiritual interest and conflicts—employs the sacred day, in innumerable instances, only to recruit its jaded energies for renewed efforts after wealth. It is sad indeed to employ the house of the living God only as a place of repose, where the man reserves his strength for more devoted service in the temple of Mammon.

Hence, then, the necessity and vast advantage of carrying on, to some extent, the exercises of social religion through the week. It is true there is the duty of private devotion, and there is also the altar of family religion; but even those are not enough to hold such truant hearts as ours to the service of God, and therefore all sections of the Christian church, and all denominations of professing Christians, have thought it incumbent to hold week-day services. Papist and Protestant; churchman, dissenter, and methodist, have all confessed the necessity of these, to keep up a due sense of religion in individuals and in the community. Nor can anything be imagined more likely, or more effectual, to break down the idea that piety is a matter exclusively confined to the sabbath day, and to impress it upon the hearts and conscience of the feeble—as an every-day concern. I like to hear the bell tolling for worship on a week-day; it seems to say, "Serve the Lord at all times." I love to see the people of God come cheerfully, gravely, devoutly, and earnestly; wending their way through the busy or thoughtless crowd to the house of prayer, saying in effect to the multitude around them, "Come with us, and we will do

you good; for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel." I love to see the portals of the sanctuary open on a week evening, which, while the doors of the theater, the ball-room, and the tavern are drawing in the lovers of pleasure, shall send forth the voice of wisdom, saying, "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? Why do you spend money on what is not food, and your wages on what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and you will enjoy the choicest of foods." Give your attendance then upon week-day services.

I admit there is no *express command* for mid-week services, laid down in the New Testament. But is nothing our duty for which no positive injunction can be pleaded? Are not *general principles* in many cases sufficient, as containing particular obligations? You are not commanded to keep holy the *first* day of the week instead of the seventh; nor to attend *twice* on Sunday to hear sermons—but do you not feel it your duty when you can, because it is conducive to your edification? That we are commanded not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, is matter of plain injunction—here is a general rule laid down without any specification of times, or seasons, or frequency; and surely this general rule implies an obligation to assemble as often as we can, without infringing on other rules, or violating other obligations. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Here is the promise of Christ's presence, given generally, but encouraging frequent meetings, as convenience may allow.

In very many matters, such as the amount of our property to be given to the cause of Christ; the amount of time to be devoted to devotional exercises—only general rules are laid down, which are to be left in the hand of love to be worked out at such times and in such measure as opportunity may allow. To object to meetings that tend to edification; to doubt their obligation, because not expressly commanded, demonstrates the low standard of the objector's piety; as if every step beyond the measured way were unwillingly trodden; every farthing above the stipulated payment were grudged. The language, fairly interpreted, is this—"I cannot find it in my heart to serve God beyond a given point; that ascertained, all the rest is my own." And is this Christian

experience? Is this love? Is this, 'Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is none upon earth I desire besides you?' Cold indeed must be the heart that can reason thus, and apply the stipulations of worldly policy to the service of Him, who loved us and gave himself for us.

Here, then, is the obligation of such services; their obvious tendency, as we shall presently prove, to edification, and their exact accordance with, yes, their carrying out of, general principles, which are explicitly laid down in Scripture. And, moreover, all this is strengthened by apostolic practice. We are told concerning the first disciples, that they were "*continually* in the temple, praying and blessing God;" and again, that they "*continued daily* with one accord in the temple." This was the age of primitive and ardent piety; a type of the decision, fervor, and devotedness, which should characterize the followers of Christ in every age. This was the church's first love, before it was chilled by the contention, secularity, and earthly-mindedness, that followed. To the Christian of those days nothing would be more repugnant to the glow of their feelings, to the intense ardor of their renewed souls, than the endurance of long and tedious days of engrossing worldliness, stretching between the seasons of their solemn assemblies. Oh for the intensity of their devotion, the ardor of their love, the tenderness of their affection, the aboundings of their liberality, the fervor of their prayers, and the union and harmony of their hearts!

I will now place before you some of the rich and numerous **ADVANTAGES** of a constant and spiritual attendance upon such week-day services.

1. It will be an indication of the depth, and indeed of the reality of your piety; and furnish delightful evidence of the sincerity of your faith. To go with the multitude that keep holy the *sabbath*, and enter with joy into the courts of the Lord, is far less conclusive on these points, than the practice I now recommend. Many who are totally destitute of spiritual religion, do this. Even they would not incur the reproach of profaning the day of God, by devoting it to worldly business or pleasure. What proof then

is it that you love the habitation of God's house, and take pleasure in his service, if you are there on those days only, which you could not, with the smallest regard to reputation, spend any where else? Where can *you* go on the *sabbath*, but to the sanctuary? What can you do with your time on *that day*, but employ it in this manner? This is but a weak proof of love either to God, his worship, or his saints, to give to them only those hours which could not be otherwise engaged. But to feel *such* a love as makes you willing and pleased to take a portion of time from business, recreation, and self-indulgence—to hear the word of life, to breathe the air of devotion, and enjoy the communion of saints, seems one evidence, at least, of a heart renewed by grace.

2. What a sweet and tranquilizing occupation is it to the Christian pilgrim, weary of the cares and perplexities of life, tired with the heat and burden of the day, and harassed by the sins and follies of his fellow creatures, thus to refresh himself in the cool of the evening, with the calm of the house of prayer, the hallowed fellowship of his companions in travel to eternity, and the communion of his God. How

composing to his ruffled spirit, and how cheering to his jaded soul, to wander along the banks of that river whose streams make glad the city of God, and lose in its soft murmurs the toils of the day. How agreeable to close the ledger and open the Bible; to lose the hum and jargon of commerce in the songs of devotion; to exchange the society of the worldly and the wicked for that of the righteous; and after having all day looked at seen and temporal things, then to look beyond the narrow and cloudy horizon at unseen and eternal things! Is not such a *duty* a rich *privilege* also?

3. It helps to perpetuate the impressions, and to preserve the benefits of the sabbath. How many, at the close of the day of rest, think with a sigh on the coming morning, when the short and sacred respite from toil and labor will be over, the world with all its thorny cares return, and the solemn musings, the devout aspirations, and the deep impressions of the holy day be ended and dissipated. How desirable is it, then, to keep alive the feeling, and purposes, and plans of spiritual improvement which were

called up by the sermon and the sanctuary. "Alas," says the Christian, "that when raised by the solemnities of public worship on the Lord's day to an unusual height of devotional feeling, and enrapt into something like a joy unspeakable and full of glory, by the exhibition of the truth as it is in Jesus; alas, that all this is to be followed, disturbed, and destroyed, by the secular pursuits, cares, and anxieties of the next morning! Oh that it were always sabbath!"

So it will be in heaven—and even upon earth, the sabbath day views and feelings may be rendered more abiding and influential than they are, by a spiritual attendance on the week-day services. Some ministers recapitulate the leading thoughts of one or two of the discourses delivered on the preceding Sunday, a practice calculated not only to instruct the mind, but to call up the emotions and revive the enjoyment which the first and full delivery of them awakened.

4. It checks the growth of worldly-mindedness, and tends to keep down the engrossing power of seen and temporal things. Necessarily occupied through the day, and from day to day, in attention to earthly things; with not only the hands full of worldly business, but the heart also; with the mind kept on the full stretch on the subject of profit and loss; and thus led, almost without choice or design, to form an over estimate of the importance of such matters, until the soul of the professor resembles his shop, and is full of the din, and solicitude, and eagerness of trade—how salutary, and how admonitory it is to quit for an hour in the evening this busy scene, to look at other objects, to engage in other pursuits, and to call up other feelings—and those all of a holy, heavenly, and eternal nature. How calculated is such an exercise, by checking the otherwise ceaseless tread of worldly thoughts and feelings in the soul, to prevent the heart from being beaten into that hard, cold, still, and barren worldly-mindedness, which characterizes the devoted follower of mammon. How often, as the believer, after a day's worldly occupation, during which he has been much excited by alternate hopes and fears, has sat listening to a sermon on the vanity of earthly things, and the glory of heavenly ones—has he felt grieved, astonished, and humbled, that he should allow his mind to think so much of

terrestrial objects, and so little of celestial things. How often has he there seen and felt the unsoundness and sinfulness of some customs and maxims, which have been admitted into the commercial ethics of modern times, and has determined to abandon them. How often has he been stopped from making a bargain, and fulfilling a purpose, which, had they been completed, would have brought guilt upon his conscience, whatever property they would have placed in his pocket.

"No snare like the world—for catching away human hearts from the concerns of their eternity. How soon do we get entangled in its works, and become the easy prey of the devil! But to frequent the house of God—to break in upon worldly avocations by oft repeated visits there—is the sure method of disentangling the perplexed spirit. Go to the summit of a lofty mountain, and looking round on the spectacle of sublimity which the landscape presents, will it be possible at that moment to feel the burden of cares which lies in the almost invisible locality below? Will not all be forgotten in the contemplation of grand and magnificent objects? So here—'the hill of God is a high hill, as the hill of Bashan,' and the spirit that places itself but a little while on its summit, throws off its burden, and prepares for flight. Thus is the mind refreshed, and returns to the duties of life every way better prepared to discharge them than before."

5. It tends to elevate the tone, and invigorate the strength of our piety. What we want, is not only morality, though there can be no piety without this, and the morality of a Christian should be far above that of the worldling, for it should be rigid, unbending, minute, generous, self-denying. But this is not all he should do, and be, and exhibit. He should not only be the man of honor towards his fellow men—but the man of devotion, of spirituality, of piety, towards God. He should have the religion of the closet, in association with that of the shop. His heart should point God-ward and heaven-ward; and the way to this is to be much in devotional exercises. We cannot ascend into the higher, and purer, and less cloudy regions of our holy religion; we cannot live by faith; we cannot see the glory of the Lord; we cannot enter into the cleft rock, and see Jehovah pass by; we cannot thus find heaven begun upon earth—without

taking pains, and making sacrifices, and giving ourselves to this matter, as of vast importance to us. We must not content ourselves with just as much time devoted to religious exercises, and just as much attention given to public worship, as will quiet conscience, and satisfy the demand of others as worldly as ourselves; but we must give ourselves to these things; we must sow beside all waters; we must be content to give up a little more of the minding of the flesh than some do, who are professors notwithstanding, in order that we may be more devoted in minding the things of the Spirit. It is the diligent soul that is made fat; the soul that feeds well, with keen appetite, and at regular intervals—on the provision of God's house, even of his holy temple.

6. It is an encouragement and a stimulus to others.

What is beneficial to us, is equally so to them. They can no more neglect the week-day opportunities without suffering loss, than we can. If we are faithful to ourselves, and are diligent in the ways of the Lord, we shall probably be the means of drawing them with us and after us. While, on the other hand, as evil example is still more contagious than good, *our* negligence will make *them* negligent. Oftentimes one careless professor going home to enjoy himself, or going to take his walk in the country, or continuing unnecessarily long at his business—has been met, and has felt reprov'd, by the example and the words of another, on his way to the house of God—the reproof in some cases has had its desired effect, and the carelessness of one has been removed by the earnestness of the other. On the other hand, how ready have younger Christians been to plead the example of older ones.

Christians are not sufficiently aware of the importance of example, and of their responsibility for their influence. *How* would piety flourish in churches, and all the glowing beauties of holiness spread over them, and shine out from them, if all their members were to give themselves up to a diligent, constant, and spiritual attendance on week-day services of religion!

7. How it encourages the heart of the faithful pastor to see his flock then gathered around him, valuing his

instructions so highly as to sacrifice a portion of that time which they could otherwise spend in business or pleasure—in order to attend these week-day services.

8. What a proof is it to the world of a Christian's earnestness in the pursuit of salvation; and what an admonition to the multitude who are so intent upon the pursuit of wealth and nothing more, as to grudge even the sabbath to the service of religion, and are ever exclaiming, when will it be over, that we may buy, and sell, and get gain? What an impressive voice does a large congregation, assembled on a week-day evening for religious instruction, send forth to the neighborhood in which it is found, saying, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."

I will now mention some of the **DIFFICULTIES**, **HINDRANCES**, and **EXCUSES**, which lead to a neglect of such services, and which in the opinion of many justify that neglect.

TRADESMEN often say they have no time; they *cannot* leave their business—that is, they *will* not. I am aware that it is not, and could not, by any contrivance and forethought, be always made convenient for tradesmen, especially shopkeepers, to be at the house of God on a week-day evening; but could it not be oftener done than it is? Would not a settled purpose, a good plan, and a little preparation, *generally* leave the way open for such people to the sanctuary? Is it not enough time given to the world, to carry on its concerns until seven o'clock in the evening? If there be a party to be joined, or some public business to be attended to, cannot tradesmen find time for this? Oh! brethren, try, try! Be anxious to throw off the cares of the world, in enough time to be found in your place at the house of God, on the evening of the weekly service.

But *your residence is too far in the country to enable you to attend*. Then why go so far? Why sacrifice the pleasure and improvement to be gained in the sanctuary, for the enjoyment of rural scenes? The modern taste for a country residence is making sad work with piety. How many are

there who, on this account, can attend only one public service even on the sabbath! And has it not proved a snare in other ways, leading to a neglect of their trade, and to expenses which their income was not adequate to meet? Your salvation, professing Christians, your salvation is, or should be, the great business with you—and everything else should be subordinate to it.

Some who will read this address are the MOTHERS of large families, and imagine they find in their domestic and maternal cares an insurmountable obstacle in the way of such services as I now recommend, and a sufficient excuse for neglecting them. I readily allow that in many cases this is admissible. Duties cannot be in opposition to each other. There is no religion in neglecting a needy family, and allowing the home to be a scene of confusion—even though it be to attend public worship. And if this must be the result, judgment and conscience being witnesses, your way is clear, and the place of your duty is home. But be quite sure that you could not by method, diligence, preparation, and judicious delegation—attend to every duty of home, and yet leave opportunity for one weekly visit to the sanctuary. I have known mothers who were patterns of devotedness to home duties, and at the same time were exemplary in their attendance at the house of God. The devoted mother needs an occasional relaxation from her assiduities; and what so refreshing, as an hour spent in the house of God?

A more difficult case is that of the WIFE, *whose husband is altogether hostile to true religion*, and especially so to its week-day engagements. Constant attendance, in such circumstances, can hardly be expected; and many thus situated must forego the privilege, and seek to make up by renewed diligence in the use of the private means of grace, the loss they are compelled to sustain of the public ones.

LABORING MEN, I am aware, are under a strong temptation, after a day's hard toil, to imagine they are too tired for a sermon, and that they will be excused by God for going home to spend the evening in their own house, instead of his. In many, very many cases, this is not a legitimate excuse, but a sufficient reason for their neglect; their labor is so great, and so exhausting, as to utterly incapacitate

them for that mental application which is necessary for a profitable attendance upon the means of grace. In this case the gracious Redeemer himself makes the same defense for them as he did for his slumbering disciples, and says the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Consider, then, dear brethren, the word of exhortation on this important subject; renounce all excuses; endeavor to be in a state of mind which shall not prompt you to seek after them. Be in earnest, far more in earnest, than are the generality of professors, about your soul's concerns. Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Hunger and thirst after righteousness. Live the life of faith. Set your affections not on things on the earth, but on things above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Be not satisfied with mere external religious decorum, and a consistency in which the world, or your fellow professors, can see no flaw. Let your thoughts be in heaven; feel and act as the citizens of the celestial state. Walk with God; rejoice in hope of the glory to be revealed; and steadily look at eternity. In order to keep up such a state of mind, comply with the admonition of this address. Let it be matter of conscience, not of taste merely, to attend the week-day services. You need them; and they will help and bless you. Be *regular* in your attendance. Do not let it be a mere occasional thing to be there, when an admonition has been delivered on the Sabbath calling upon you for the performance of this duty, or when something extraordinary is to be heard. This is the case with too many. We see them sometimes, but oftener miss them. *Be it with you*, an ordinance fixed as the sabbath; keep the evening free from all occupation; make no other engagement. When invited to something else, say, "No, that evening is given to God." "The diligent soul," I repeat, "shall be made fat." *This* is diligence. May it be yours.

[HOME](#)[QUOTES](#)[SERMONS](#)[BOOKS](#)