CONFESSIONS OF A WORSHIP LEADER:
MY DAILY PERSONAL WORSHIP PATTERN
Dan Wilt

As a creative personality, I've struggled through the years to establish patterns in my personal worship life. Random approaches have killed me over time, but dry regimen has been equally useless to the way my mind and soul seem to work.

So, my new normal is the following. Here is a detailed glimpse into my daily pattern, a set of personal rituals and physical actions, that keep me grateful, focused, addressing fear, and leaning emotionally and mentally into Christ each day.

This takes about 30 minutes in the morning, a few minutes through the day, and then about 5 minutes at night. Until I get further guidance, this works, so I'll stick to it as closely as possible. I try to do a "mini" or "modified" version of each of these steps below if I'm traveling or in a circumstance that makes it difficult.

I'd love to hear what your best patterns are, along with your struggles and successes.

MORNING (30-50 minutes)

5:30-6:00 am - Wake

6:00-6:05 am (5 min.) - Standing in front of our fireplace mantle, I first take a moment to become aware of God's presence.

I then devote myself to Jesus (I like to physically cross myself in Orthodox tradition, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; it just helps me focus).

Then I light a candle for each family member (nothing magical; it just focuses me to remember them and I enjoy my prayer time more with a flame in front of me) and one large candle for the wider Church, pray for each person, read the Morning Prayer out loud from "How Is Your Soul?" (link below). (Note: I often lead gathered worship with a small candle at my feet, when possible, as it is my reminding symbol that Christ is present with me.)

6:05-6:15 am (10 min.) - I sit down in a favorite spot where my Bible, Journal, iPad and pen are always sitting (my wife calls it "creating your nest," i.e. making a convenient and beloved space for your time with God. It's your "chapel" if that helps). Having things convenient and in my reach has been important for me. If I have to get up and look for things, I get distracted.

Read Morning Psalm and OT passage from the Common Lectionary (I use the Lectionary app to guide me, but I read them in my Spiritual Formation Bible with Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, and others).

I read out loud so the words, metaphors, stories enter through my ears as well as my eyes.

6:15-6:30 am - I quiet my heart, and listen in silence for a few moments. Then I begin to journal. I always start by writing my thanks (Ann Voskamp's 1000 Gifts has helped me in this).

I note ideas from the Scriptures I've read, document my dreams, unearth a fear that I feel rising in me, express prayers, sketch ideas (I use a blank page sketchbook as my journal; I think visually as well as in words, so it helps me enjoy the time), and even note songs I've woken up singing (from others or new ones stirring in me).

I close my journal, offer more thanks for anything I can think of, and turn my heart to expectation that God will meet me during the day.

If there is time that day, I then add the following.

6:30-6:50 am - I read from a devotional book or helpful book to allow the thoughts to stir in me for the day. Right now I am reading "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" by Peter Scazzero, and "1000 Gifts" by Ann Voskamp. (Both books, in my mind, should be read by every Christian I know. The first, especially, is the remedy to myriad ills that daily trip us up. I can't recommend it enough.)

If there is time, I may sit down with my guitar, keyboard, or hammered dulcimer and worship or create a song (corporate worship or artist song), but not all the time. I'm a songwriter/hymnwriter, so I can get lost here, and there isn't always time on weekdays due to my work patterns.

(Note: In the morning, I am working hard to not turn on my iPhone or look at anything other than the Lectionary on my iPad until after I have begun my work day. There is just too much noise there to distract, and it's a mental vortex for me once I enter my email or Facebook. So, I delay it. At times I'll make a Facebook post out of something the Lord shows me during my personal worship time, but not all the time. If I do that, I work to remain disciplined to leave Facebook and avoid reading posts.)

After all this, I go for an hour walk or run, shower, eat a quick breakfast, do a family chore or two, and get ready to start work.

DAYTIME (6 minutes)

I take 1 minute, 6 times a day, to reorient to a thankful heart. Here's how I do it through the day.

I have a reminder set on my iPhone to the hours of 6 am (prime), 9 am (terce), 12 pm (sext), 3 pm (none), 6 pm (vespers), and 9 pm (compline). These are the "daily hours" of church history, originating from the Roman marketplace times. They actually are meant to include 12 am (matins) and 3 am (lauds), but for obvious reasons, I skip those.

For me, a simple alert titled "Early Morning Thanks" or "Evening Thanks," etc. comes up. I created the event on my phone, set it for "every day," and up it comes. I pause, just for a moment, and give thanks for all that has occurred the previous hours, and all that will occur in the next.

Each moment is less than 1 minute. Often, it's just 30 seconds. In times of stress, I may take longer. I linger until any fear, any anger, any renegade thought is submitted to Christ.

DINNER (8 minutes)

For family grace, I always start with the phrase, "The Lord be with you." Everyone then responds, "And also with you." This must be taught, and in the teenage years a grunt or silence is fine. When guests come, I explain it to them so they're not caught off guard. It's a great joy to do this each night. It's a mutual blessing.

Almost every evening, after dinner, we read the New Testament passage and the Evening Psalm from the Common Lectionary after dinner as our Family Worship. I read it, or someone else does.

This final step takes about 5-8 minutes. Sometimes I cut it short, especially the Psalm. Sometimes, we don't read at all. At rare times, we linger over an idea.

I work hard to keep it all short and sweet. If the kids feel like each meal is a big spiritual ordeal, it can have a negative effect on our family life. I get in, and then I get out.

EVENING (varies)

I try to keep evening activities down as much as possible, especially with teenagers and college kids on the go and our need for rest. Either way, and no matter the events, I attempt to keep my daily thanks moments going.

I'm often drawn to my instruments in the evening, so that is the time when songwriting occurs for me. Some of the songs I write are worship songs, and others are purely artist songs (more self-expression; not meant for corporate use). Sometimes I'll just get lost in a song that has been moving me that day.

I long for more time here, but my current work and family life doesn't afford it. As able, and as God creates space, this gets more of my time and energy.

BEDTIME (5 minutes)

Again, using "How Is Your Soul?" from Vineyard USA, I turn to the Daily Examen page (I keep one copy downstairs in my 'nest' for my morning time, and one copy upstairs by my bed for my bedtime to make it easy).

I take 5-10 minutes maximum, and go through the 5 phases of Stillness, Gratitude, Reflection, Joy & Sorrow, and Hope. Sometimes I turn to the "Evening Prayer" and read it out loud.

WEEKLY (24 hours)

Every week, from sundown on Saturday night to sundown on Sunday night, we attempt to keep "sabbath." This is a time of rest, renewal, play, family interaction.

My kids know that I usually turn off my phone during this time, and so they must contact Mom if there is blood spilled or if they really need something (like permission to have a friend sleep over).

To my wife, this is like a mini-vacation each week, and we fight to keep it. When I am leading worship, or teaching, I do my best to create space around my work related to those things. It's almost impossible, but I go for it anyway. Pre-preparation for leading or speaking is vital to my wife's sanity and peace, and, I have found, to my own as well.

I HOPE THIS HELPS YOU

I always wished that others would be more specific about how they keep their own soul grateful and focused in the wear and tear of life. As for me, I still have all the same battles you have; I just have found that these patterns keep my heart centered and my spirit resilient as I face my own challenges.

I hope this window into my own pattern, evolving as it will be, will inspire you to find your "best practices" for personal worship that will keep you over a lifetime.

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