In a book entitled *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*, author and poet Annie Dillard writes an interesting little essay on life called “Living Like Weasels.” She wrote it after observing a weasel in the wild. This is what she writes:

“A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks?…Obedient to instinct, he bites his prey at the neck, either splitting the jugular vein at the throat or crunching the brain at the base of the skull, and he does not let go. One naturalist refused to kill a weasel who was socketed into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake. The man could in no way pry the tiny weasel off, and had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel dangling from his palm, and soak him off like a stubborn label. And once, says Ernest Thompson Seton – once a man shot an eagle out of the sky. He examined the eagle and found the dry skull of a weasel fixed by the jaws to his throat. The supposition is that the eagle had pounced on the weasel and the weasel swiveled and bit as instinct taught him, tooth to neck, and nearly won. I would like to have seen that eagle from the air a few weeks or months before he was shot: was the whole weasel still attached to his feathered throat, a fur pendant?”

Reflecting on the way a weasel locks its jaws on what it wants and holds onto it for dear life, and particularly on the way that one weasel grasped the eagle’s neck and wouldn’t let it go, Dillard concludes her essay with this remarkable observation: “I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you.”

“I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you.” What is your one necessity? What is the one thing, above all things, that you most desire? What is the one thing that weasel-like you want to grasp with all your might and dangle from wherever it may take you? What is the one thing, above all things, you most want to live for?

Life is full of many things and many of these things are good. And we should be grateful for the many things that fill our lives with earthly joy. We should be grateful for our families and our friends, for our work and for our leisure, for the money we make and the material things we enjoy. But none of these things should be the one thing above all things that we most desire. Instead, there should be some overarching or organizing center toward which our lives are directed, and around which our lives are rightly ordered. For the psalmist, that one thing was the person of God. In Psalm 27:4, the psalmist said: “One thing I asked of the L ORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the L ORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the L ORD, and to inquire in his temple.” Above all else, the psalmist
wanted to live a God-centered life; a life directed toward God and organized around God with God at its center.

You see, a life with no center is an uncentered life; it's a life without focus and meaningful direction. And many people are living uncentered lives, wandering aimlessly through their days, pursing first this thing and then that. Others are living with other things, lesser things, at the center of life and are living lesser lives as a consequence—falling far short of their God ordained best—because a person’s life will only rise to the level of the thing or things that a person desires most of all.

But this was not the case with the psalmist. He was not living for lesser things but for the highest things. He was not living an uncentered life but instead, he was pursuing a God-centered life; a life directed toward God and organized around God with God at its center. And what, according to the psalmist, does such a life look like? Well a God-centered life is a life oriented toward the house of God, focused on the beauty of God, and ever seeking the will of God.

First, a God-centered life is a life oriented toward the house of God. You see, the psalmist said, “One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.” For the psalmist, God’s house was either the tabernacle or the Temple, depending on when this psalm was written. In either case, it was the place of corporate worship where the people of God gathered to worship God according to the ordinances of God as laid out in the word of God.

Now I believe regular worship in God’s house is still essential for maintaining a God-centered life. In a world awash with media messages that are almost wholly hostile to God and God’s values, we must gather regularly, routinely, and consistently with other believers to reinforce each other in this holy faith or else, over time, we will be corrupted by the surrounding culture and conformed to the world and its worldly ways.

It is in corporate worship that we hear the word of God powerfully proclaimed in sermon and in song. It is in corporate worship that we receive God’s saving and enabling grace through the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. It is in corporate worship that we provoke one another to love and good deeds and encourage each other to remain true to Christ in the midst of an alien culture. All of this takes place through regular worship in the house of God. So Hebrews 10:23-25 admonishes us saying: “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day (the day of Judgment) approaching.”

Yes, I believe corporate worship is still essential for maintaining a God-centered life but fewer and fewer people believe that to be true. According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in
August of 2013, the percentage of Americans who say they “seldom” or “never” attend religious services rose from 25% in 2003 to 29% in 2013. In addition, the percentage of people who say they attend services at least once a week declined from 39% to 37% during that same period.iii In addition, the Pew Center found that 32% of adults ages 18-29 currently have no religious affiliation whatsoever.iv

Nevertheless, despite this erosion of worship attendance, I believe regular worship attendance is essential for maintaining a God-centered life. And this is not my belief alone. The Bible tells us that on the Sabbath day, Jesus attended worship in the synagogue as was his custom. (Lk. 4:16) If Jesus believed it important to attend corporate worship on a regular basis then who are we to imagine that sinners like us can somehow maintain a God-centered life without doing likewise?

Yes, corporate worship is essential for maintaining a God-centered life. Interestingly enough, even the architecture of the original Naval Academy Yard proclaimed this to be true. Writing for the Annapolis Home Magazine, Chip Bohl describes how the architect Earnest Flagg designed the Academy grounds. According to Bohl, “Flagg’s design is composed with axial precision and monumental clarity around the central quadrangle. The dormitory Bancroft Hall with its heroic entrance stair is axially opposite the classroom Mahan Hall. Perpendicular to this axis and also centered in the quadrangle is the axis established by the Chapel and a grand boat basin. These five physical features embody the educational program: camaraderie at the dormitory; spirituality at the Chapel; intellectuality at the classroom; naval skills at the boat basin; and unity of purpose at the quadrangle. The Chapel is given primary status in the campus; it is the tallest structure, placed on the highest ground. All land is shaped to slope uniformly away from it.”v

Friends, just as the Chapel is given primary status on this campus by being the tallest building on the highest ground, so too, the house of God should always hold a primary place in our hearts and in our affections. All of life should slope up to it, for through its worship we are guided toward God and kept in the faith of Jesus Christ. Without it, we can easily succumb to the siren songs of a sinful culture and find ourselves conformed to the world rather than transformed by the renewing of our minds after the pattern and teaching of Jesus Christ.

So a God-centered life is a life oriented toward the house of God and focused on the beauty of God. In Psalm 27:4, the psalmist said: “One thing I asked of the L ORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the L ORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the L ORD.” Some commentators think the psalmist is here referring to the beautiful accoutrements that adorned the Tabernacle or the Temple. And that may well be the case. For both the Tabernacle and the Temple were beautifully adorned.
Exodus 25:1-9, for example, describes the beautiful materials used to decorate the Tabernacle. “The Lord said to Moses: Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me. This is the offering that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen, goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, fine leather, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breastpiece. And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them.” (NRSV)

Yes, God’s house was beautifully adorned. But notice that the psalmist says he wants to behold the beauty of the Lord, not the beauty of these adornments. You see, all of the beautiful accoutrements in the Tabernacle and the Temple were meant to point beyond themselves to the beauty of God himself. Whole books have been written to explain how each item in the Tabernacle was intended to point beyond itself to some heavenly reality and the book of Hebrews in the New Testament even picks up on this theme.

So as important as God’s house is in helping us live a God-centered life, we must always remember that we do not worship the house of God but the God who occupies the house. As beautiful as are the accoutrements of worship, and they are truly beautiful here in this marvelous chapel, we must always remember that they are meant to point beyond themselves to the beauty of God himself. They are like windows. And there are two ways to view a window. You may look at the window or you may look through the window to see what lies beyond. The psalmist wanted to look through the beauty of the Tabernacle or Temple to see the beauty of God himself.

And if we want to live a God-centered life then we need to learn how to look through the beauty of this worship space, and through the beauty of every single place, to see the beauty of God’s wondrous face; for God can be seen everywhere and in everything by those who are searching for him. As the old song says:

This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world,
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.

Yes, God speaks to us everywhere! And if we want to live a God-centered life then we need to cultivate the capacity to see through things to the God who makes all things. We need to cultivate the capacity to see through things to the God who sustains all things. We need to cultivate the capacity to see through every event to the God who is ever present; the God who rules over and overrules all things for his glory.

I like the story of the grandfather who took his young grandson fishing. It was autumn. The breeze was brisk but the sun was warm. As they sat on the pier with their lines dangling in the water, they talked about all those things grandfathers and grandsons tend to talk about. Suddenly the conversation turned to religion. “Grandpa, have you ever seen God?” the little boy asked. The old man looked around at the trees in all their autumn glory, at the sun shimmering off the rippled lake, and at the towheaded boy sitting beside him and looking up at him with innocent eyes and said, “Son, it’s gotten to where God is all I ever see!”

That, my friend, is a God-centered life; a life that can see through anything and everything to behold the beauty of the Lord in all things! When you and I develop that capacity, the capacity to see God anywhere and everywhere, then life will be centered on Him as it’s never been centered before and we will be transformed into his likeness as we gaze upon his beauty. As it says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “…all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another…” As we behold him, we become like him. That’s why it’s so important for us to focus our minds upon God and the things of God. As Paul says in Philippians 4:8-9, “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things….And the God of peace will be with you.”

Yes, a God-centered life is a life oriented toward the house of God, focused on the beauty of God, and always seeking the will of God. As the psalmist said, “One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.”
What does it mean to inquire of the Lord? It means that we seek God’s guidance in all things. I read recently about how the parents of Anne Lindbergh, the wife of Charles Lindbergh, once got lost while visiting England. When they realized they were lost, they stopped a little boy and asked him for directions to the nearest station. "Well," the boy answered, "You turn to the right there by the grocer’s shop and then take the second street to the left. That will bring you to a place where four streets meet. And then, sir, you had better inquire again." That’s what it means to inquire of the Lord. It means that we ask God for directions, go as far as he guides, and then ask for his guidance again, and again, and again, and again all through life.

How do we inquire of the Lord? We inquire by taking our questions directly to God in prayer and listening to the quiet promptings of his Spirit. We inquire by reading the Bible with an eye to how its principles apply to our particular situation. We inquire by seeking godly counsel from God’s saints on earth and his saints above. What advice do the saints, both living and dead, have regarding our situation, problem, or question? And in all of this, we must have the attitude of Jesus who, when seeking his Father's guidance concerning the Cross, said, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup (this Cross) from me: nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.” (Lk. 22:42 KJV)

I started this sermon by asking a series of questions. In closing, let me ask them again. What is your one necessity? What is the one thing, above all things, that you most desire? What is the one thing that weasel-like you want to grasp with all your might and dangle from wherever it may take you? What is the one thing, above all things, you most want to live for? For the psalmist, that one thing was no “thing” at all. It was the person of God. Above all else, the psalmist wanted to live a God-centered life: a life oriented toward the house of God; a life focused on the beauty of God; a life seeking the will of God, both to know it and to do it.

What about you? Can you say what the psalmist said? Can you say with sincerity: “One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple?” If you can’t say that with any measure of sincerity then don’t despair. Instead, look to Jesus. According to John 2:17, zeal for God’s house consumed him. If you have been united with Christ in baptism then his zeal is credited to your account and you are no longer condemned for your lack of spiritual passion. Instead, you are forgiven and given the Holy Spirit to aid you and empower you. So thank Christ for this forgiveness and ask the Spirit to help you live a more God-centered life; a life oriented toward the house of God; focused on the beauty of God, and ever seeking the will of God. He’ll answer that prayer and I guarantee you will find rich blessing. In the words of Psalm 27:6, your head will be exalted above your enemies and your mouth will be filled with loud shouts of joy! Amen.

Ibid, p. 16.

