

Preparation for Sunday, March 4, 2012

I Long for You, Lord

Introduction

Today, we begin a study on worship, focusing on the psalms. The Psalms were Israel's hymnbook. They recorded worship songs of God's people. They also uniquely chronicled Israel's history.

1. *In the Wizard of Oz, what did Dorothy long for from the very beginning of the movie?*
2. *How did that longing influence her entire journey?*

There is no place like home. Imagine what goes on in a soldier's mind when he or she thinks about home. Much like Dorothy or those soldiers, the writer of Psalms 42-43 is away from his home—the temple which represents the presence of God. In his homesick status, he encounters depression and a longing for returning to his former level of intimacy with God.

MONDAY

Is God Still There? Read Psalm 42:1-5 and answer the following questions

1. *Of all the animals that the psalmist could have used, why do you think he chose a deer to describe himself?*
2. *What phrases stick out to you in this passage and why?*
3. *What does the Psalmist remember from his past in verse 4? How does that memory affect his present state of mind?*
4. *Can you admit that there have been times in your life when you were closer to God than you are now? How does this knowledge affect you?*
5. *When you are hunting, where do you set up your deer stand?*
6. *Have you ever created your own water or food source in order to lure a deer into your crosshairs?*
7. *Can you think of examples of Satan trying to convince believers of his ability to meet needs only God can meet? (There are plenty of examples in our world today, but if no one else mentions it, point out that this was how the first temptation worked in the Garden of Eden. (Gen. 3:1-7) It was also how Satan tried to tempt Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-4))*

How Long Could You live Without...?: Do you know how long you could live without Food? 8 weeks. How long without Water? 3-5 days. How long without Air? 3-5 minutes.

1. *Can you think of a time you went for an extended period without one of these? What effect did it have on you?*
2. *When you think of "life without God?" How do you imagine it? Do you think in terms of no longer going to church, or reading your Bible, or prayer?*
3. *Or, do you think of whether or not the Universe could function if God were to withdraw His sustaining hand from it?*
4. *Recall that the title of this unit of study is "The Heart of Worship." What is the connection between worshiping God and thirsting for God?*

The truth is, we can't imagine a universe with God's hand removed from it, because it could not last for even a millisecond. But there are many people in the world who have turned away from God being involved in their everyday lives. There may be some of us who have had seasons in our lives where we were far away from God. When you look back on those times, how would you characterize them?

1. *Think about the lowest part or time in your life. What caused you to get there?*
2. *Think about the highest part or time in your life. What was happening that caused you to get there?*

The psalmist remembered a time when his life was way high. He used to lead worship, but now he was far from that spot.

1. *What can we do when we find ourselves in spiritually low positions?*
2. *What did the psalmist resolve to do?*

TUESDAY

Is God Paying Attention? Read Psalm 42:6-11 and answer the following questions

The psalmist was very honest about his feelings. His situation led him to depression and he questioned God's presence. Even through this, he maintained his hope in God.

1. *What is the word picture in verse 7? (Answer: It is of someone being completely overwhelmed by the rising tide of circumstances in his life. "Deep calls to deep" is a reminder of how God burst open "all the sources of the watery depths" when He flooded the world in Genesis 7:11.)*
2. *Speaking of images from the Old Testament, what does verse 8 remind you of? (Answer: The way God led the Israelites through the wilderness: a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21))*
3. *The psalmist seems to waver between confidence (verses 6, 8, and 11) and doubt (verses 7, 9-10).*
4. *Do you find yourself doing the same thing when you are faced with overwhelming circumstances?*
5. *Do you see that to be true in life?*
6. *When many obstacles stack up upon each other, what are ways that people respond?*
7. *What else can cause people our age to doubt God's presence?*
8. *When you are this low, what lifts you up again?*
9. *Is this a temporary lifting up or a long-term solution?*

The psalmist is experiencing difficult circumstances, and it isn't clear exactly who is the author of those circumstances. In this lineup, we see three common understandings of what happens when people go through situations: 1) God did it, 2) God allowed it, or 3) God couldn't stop it.

1. *Why are some people prone to believe that God brings about the trials in our lives?*
2. *Why are some more comfortable that God didn't do it, he simply allowed it?*
3. *Why do some feel better to think it is all the work of someone other than God?*
4. *Do all trials simply fall in one category?*
5. *Which picture in the lineup describes how most people think?*
6. *Which picture in the lineup describes how you think?*

WEDNESDAY

Can God Handle Our Honesty?: Read Matthew 11:2-11.

1. *What stories do you remember about John the Baptist (Jesus' birth, Jesus' baptism, preaching, locust and honey, beheading, etc.)?*
2. *After which of these episodes did Jesus refer to John the Baptist as the greatest "among those born of*

women,” which is pretty much all of us?

3. What does this tell you about whether or not God can handle our “brutal honesty?”
4. What is our assurance that God really is paying attention to us in our times of discouragement?

Insight: It’s remarkable to realize that Jesus’ huge compliment came right after John sent his followers to Jesus while he was in prison. The man who had proclaimed he was the Lamb of God was very low and had doubts if Jesus was really the Messiah. As Jesus responds to him, he praises him for his life. This reveals that God isn’t bothered by our questions, in fact, He knows we will have them. He just prefers that we bring them to him like John the Baptist did. The psalmist struggled with doubts, but at least he was taking them to God Himself.

THURSDAY

Will God Still Protect Me? Read Psalm 43

1. What does the psalmist pray for in verse 1? (vindication) What does this mean? Vindication of what? (While it is not clear from the text, it could be vindication of the psalmist’s confidence in God. Just as Job continued to insist that God was just (Job 31:35-38) here the Psalmist continued to insist that God would come to his aid, even when his enemies were taunting him for his confidence in God (see Ps. 42:10).
2. What does the Psalmist believe will bring him back to God’s holy mountain in verse 3?
3. How do we receive God’s light and truth? (through God’s Word)
4. What does that tell you about what we need to be doing when we don’t “feel” God’s presence?
5. Have the Psalmist’s circumstances changed by the end of the Psalm? If not, what has changed?

Option Activity: Find a plastic fork, and while holding it, read the following story:

A woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness met with her pastor to discuss arrangements for her funeral. In addition to discussing the songs she wanted sung at the service, the scriptures she wanted read, and other ordinary details, she had one more request for her pastor: “I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.” She went on to explain that at any meal she was ever served, when the host instructed everyone to keep their fork, it was the sign that dessert was on the way.

“So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder “What’s with the fork?”. Then I want you to tell them: “Keep your fork... the best is yet to come.”

Sure enough, at the funeral people were walking by the woman’s casket and they saw the pretty dress she was wearing and her favorite Bible and the fork placed in her right hand. Over and over, the pastor heard the question. “What’s with the fork?” And over and over again, he just smiled.

Summary: In maintaining a heart of worship, we must stay focused that God is in control. Even when our circumstances are less than desirable, he is still worthy of our worship and we need to put our hope in him. And like the woman in the story, we have the assurance that “the best is yet to come.”

FRIDAY and SATURDAY

Additional Reading

I have included two additional articles that relate to this study. They are:

1. The Deer - Imagery in the Old Testament; and
2. The Meaning of Refuge