

Spiritual Thirst in a Shallow Age

Introduction. In his book, *Water From a Deep Well*, Gerald Sittser suggests that many modern Christians suffer from spiritual shallowness because they only draw from contemporary sources. The past, he argues, provides deep nourishment for faith and discipleship. Sittser then offers this observation and indictment of modern Christianity: “Much of what we see and experience in contemporary Christianity is not leading us into the depths of God. If anything, it is making us feel restless and dissatisfied. ‘There must be more than this!’ we say to ourselves. We grow weary of trivial controversies and petty jealousies that divide the church, massive buildings and glittery programs that dazzle but do not make disciples, self-help sermons that gloss over the great truths of the biblical faith, styles of worship that pander to popular tastes, and Christian leaders who strive for political influence at the cost of faithfulness to the gospel.”

Sittser asserted that our spiritual growth and development can be enriched through the historical accounts of martyrs, missionaries, reformers, and the lives of faithful, ordinary Christians.

Our spiritual thirst can also be quenched by drinking deeply from the Old Testament book of Psalms, specifically Psalm 42 in this lesson. The psalm is authored by the sons of Korah, worship leaders in the Old Testament sanctuary.

Because of the well-known hymn which uses the beginning of this psalm, you’re tempted to think it’s a psalm of outstanding declaration of faith. But this psalm is deeply personal and fluctuates between faith and despair, all the while longing for the Lord, remembering God, and ultimately trusting in Him.

Every Christian’s soul must pant for God like the deer pants for the water. To help all of us to build deep spiritual longing, we’re going to break this psalm into two parts and make some comments about how we can believe and grow in God.

I. My Soul Pants for God

- A. The simile of the “deer” expresses the intense yearning of the psalmist for an assurance of God being with him. The psalmist’s longing is for “God,” then “the living God,” and finally “appear before God” (“meet with God,” NIV).
- B. The depth of his sorrow and the intensity of his emotion is expressed by “tears” as his “food.”
 - 1. Not knowing where else to turn, he looks to God for the answer both to his despairing feeling, and to his enemies who tauntingly ask, “Where is your God?” in v. 3.
 - 2. In adverse conditions the psalmist can’t do much more than to “remember” (cp. Revelation 2:5). He meditates on the pilgrimages to the temple and the joyous festivals.
- C. Some may wish that God could stand by their bed at night and assure them of His care and provision. But the mechanism God has developed for the difficulties of the soul is His Word.
 - 1. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” is learned behavior (Proverbs 3:5-6).

2. This first section of Psalm 42 challenges us to drink deeply from the water of life — to move beyond shallow spirituality, reject empty ritual, and cultivate a faith that extends far beyond a single hour on Sunday. The more you train your heart to trust in God, the more you'll "hunger and thirst after righteousness" every day (Matthew 5:6).
- D. Drinking deeply challenges us to examine our faith and seek a closer bond with God. Here's several suggestions that encourage a more intimate divine union.
 1. Really study Scripture instead of merely listening to others teach it.
 2. Engage in biblical research instead of casual reading alone.
 3. Write down insights from your Bible reading.
 4. Turn off the TV, silence your phone, and have sincere spiritual discussions.
 5. Deeply contemplate the message of hymns and spiritual songs.
 6. Read books that strengthen your faith and understanding.
 7. Revisit your Sunday sermon notes for further reflection.
 8. Slow down and rest, read, reflect, and spend time with the Lord.
- E. The refrain in v. 5 is repeated in v. 11, dividing the psalm into matching stanzas. The psalmist analyzes his feelings and asks questions of himself, expressing both despair and hope in God. Faith and doubt are twins; and when doubt seems to triumph, true faith calms its questions.

II. Has God Forgotten Me?

- A. The writer knows that God isn't literally absent (v. 6), but he also feels that the sanctuary is where he meets God most fully.
 1. Therefore, his separation has left his soul "cast down" within him (v. 6), because he wonders why God has forgotten him (v. 9).
 2. He returns in his memories to Canaan, and the water imagery with which the psalm began. But now the memories are overshadowed by deep despair.
- B. Nevertheless, the relationship the psalmist has with his God is strong. By day and night the psalmist experiences the evidences of God's care, protection, and blessing. The very experience of drawing close made God "the God of my life."
- C. Everyone has moments of doubt in their life.
 1. But in his moments of doubt and reflection on God's absence, the psalmist remembers that his God is "my Rock."
 2. In the present situation, however, he has no other recourse than to mourn because he's been abandoned to godless people. He's like a dying man, and his God's silent. His whole being ("my bones") is distressed.
 3. These reflections bring the psalmist again in v. 11 to a point of despair, self-examination, and an affirmation of hope in the future deliverance of God.
- D. When God answered Job out of the whirlwind, Job never learned the specific reason for the deaths of his children, the loss of his health, or even Satan's accusation. But he learned that the God governing a bewildering world is real, present, and wiser than Job could've ever been. We learn the same when we study the past.

Conclusion. The psalm doesn't deny depression, loneliness, or doubt. Instead, it brings those feelings honestly before God and repeatedly chooses to hope in Him. Its

central message is that even when God seems distant, the saint can continue to seek Him, remember His faithfulness, and trust that rejoicing will come again.

Therefore, reject the "Health and Wealth" gospel and the latest fads and gimmicks that attract so many with something new. Return to the fundamentals of faith. Seek the Lord. Grow your faith. Enjoy fellowship with other saints. And drink deeply of the water of life. Then, and only then, will you truly feel the words of the marvelous hymn by Martin Nystrom:

As the deer pants for the water,
So my soul longs after You.
You alone are my heart's desire,
And I long to worship You.
I want You more than gold or silver,
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver,
And the apple of my eye.
You alone are my strength, my shield,
To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire,
And I long to worship You.

I am deeply indebted to Ken Weliever for the use of his material.