

Walking with God... in the Psalms

Week 5:

**The Psalms show us how to
go the distance with God**

Daily Devotional readings:

Monday March 14 to Friday March 18

Term 1, 2005

St Marks Avalon with St Davids Palm Beach

How to connect with God in a daily devotional

Each of these devotionals in the book of the Psalms has been written to help us walk with God, day by day. Whether you have been doing this for years, or these represent your first faltering steps with God, his word will always be fresh and alive to us, and always achieve God's purpose in our lives (Heb 4:12; Isa 55:11).

A meaningful daily devotional requires some planning and discipline. The following steps will help:

1. Plan a time in your day when you will set aside everything else to give your full attention to God. Ten minutes is enough; the more, the better.
2. Find a place where you won't be interrupted
3. Pray, asking God to speak with you and to show you new things in his word.
4. Read the passage for the day slowly. Pause and re-read verses that grab your attention. Savour God's word.
5. Consider the questions set aside for each reading. You might like to write down your thoughts in a journal.
6. Pray in response to all that God shows you.
7. If you get a chance, share with someone else what God has shown you.
8. Do it again the next day.

Week 5: The Psalms show us how to go the distance with God

The Psalms are very raw and real. They show us people walking with God through the darkest of times. When we are brought low, it's easy to blame God and turn our back on him. Our devotional readings this week show us an alternative to spiritual petulance. The Psalms call us to pour out our anguish before God as an act of trust. We run to him, not from him. God is interested in every detail; every tear is precious to him. When we are bereft, the abundance of his unfailing love and kindness enable us to go the distance with God—no matter where we find ourselves.

Psalm 3 QT (Monday)

Introduction

It is true that when we pray, we pray in context. We never pray in a vacuum. We always pray in the midst of the circumstances of our life: when we're tired, when we're busy, when we're worried, when things are slow, when the day is done; or when we're in the car, when we're running late. Whatever we're doing, we pray out of the ordinary, (and sometimes extraordinary) circumstances of our life.

King David was no different. Psalm 3 is desperate and urgent prayer, offered in the heat of the moment and out of a very difficult situation: when he fled from his son Absalom¹. This is a short Psalm with a big story behind it.

This story goes like this. David's son Absalom kills his brother Amnon after Amnon had raped his sister Tamar. In response, David then sends Absalom into exile, never wanting to see him again. But after a time, Absalom pleads to return to Jerusalem, just to be near his father. So David allows him to return, although he will not meet with him face to face.

In the course of time, Absalom begins a public relations campaign in Jerusalem. He rides around in an impressive chariot with fifty men running along in front. He gets up early and greets visitors at the city gate. These visitors were usually seeking justice from the king but Absalom would intercept them, saying, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you." Then he would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he receives justice."

Absalom did this for four years. Eventually going with 200 others to Hebron, he launches a military coup and has himself proclaimed king throughout Israel. David sees and hears, and decides the best thing to do is to flee Jerusalem in fear of his life. He runs to the hills and hides. All the people of Jerusalem see his disgrace as he leaves the city dressed in sackcloth and ashes, the King fleeing from his own son! This is David's situation as he prays Psalm 3.

Read Psalm 3 now.

See over page....

¹ The whole story is found in 2 Sam 13-18

To ponder...

1. How does David express his trust in God through this Psalm?
2. In verse 5 David sleeps. Sleeping when under any stress is very difficult. Soldiers on the battle-field hardly ever sleep—the risk of ambush or attack is too great. But David sleeps. That's why verse 5 also records that David also rises, without fear. What do you lose sleep over?
3. How does this Psalm show you how to walk with God through even the toughest of times—even when deserted and alone like David? Tell God about your answer in prayer now.

Supplementary Question:

In verse 7 David prays for deliverance that includes judgment upon his oppressor. How should the God of justice and mercy respond to David's prayer?

Psalm 74 (Tuesday)

Introduction

Psalm 74 is written in the days when God appeared to have deserted his people. He had allowed his Jerusalem temple to be destroyed by the Babylonians and his people to be exiled into slavery. It was as though God had walked out on them, handing them and all they had of value over to the Babylonians as the spoils of conquest². For a devout Jew, things could not possibly get any worse.

Read Psalm 74 now.

Ponder these...

1. The Psalmist is in a bad situation. How does the Psalmist describe his dire circumstances?
2. Verses 12-17 are the turning point of this Psalm. When things cannot possibly get any worse, where does the Psalmist turn his attention? How does this become the basis of his prayer?
3. How does God's character meet your deep needs?

Talk to God about this now.

Supplementary food for thought

God's reputation is bound up in every Christian's circumstances-- no matter what the situation (for example, see verses 18-23). When we call out to God in prayer, even from the deepest hole, his faithfulness is on the line. He has promised to hear when we pray and will surely answer.

1. How is our character formed when God chooses to delay in answering our prayers?
2. How is our character formed when God chooses to answer our prayers contrary to our expectations?
3. How might praying prayers such as Psalm 74 nourish our faith and refine our character?

² Of course this is only how it appeared. God was still committed to achieving his purposes through his people. This time of exile was his way of restoring Israel to covenant faithfulness and demonstrating his own holiness. See, for example, Ezekiel 39:21-29.

Psalm 56 (Wednesday)

This is another of the Psalms set in a very specific context. In 1 Kings 21 David flees for his life from Saul. He fears that nowhere in Israel will be safe for him and so he decides to hide in enemy territory, in the city of Gath. When David is recognised in Gath, he feigns madness and escapes to the cave of Adullam. This is the setting of Psalm 56.

Imagine yourself in the cave with David as you read Psalm 56 now.

1. What does David do with his fear?
2. What do you do with your fears?
3. How does this Psalm show you how to keep close to God, even when deeply fearful or worried?

Conclusion

So God is not indifferent to our sufferings. He is not so taken up with the vast government of creation that he has no time for our tears. Jesus made the same point when he said, 'but even the hairs of your head are all numbered' (Luke 12:7).

A prayer:

*"Thy calmness bends serene above,
my restlessness to still;
around me flows Thy quickening life,
to nerve my faltering will:
Thy presence fills my solitude;
Thy providence turns all to good."*

(Samuel Longfellow, 'I look to thee in every need')

Psalm 139 (Thursday)

Introduction

There is a question we hear quite often. It usually goes something like this: 'Where is God when it hurts? I'm doing it tough right now stuck down here on earth. So why doesn't God show up to help? Why does he seem so far away?'

Psalm 139 answers this question.

Read Psalm 139

1. What does Psalm 139 have to say about the extent of God's knowledge of you?
2. Is there any place you can hide from God (see especially vv 7-12)?
3. There is an old saying that goes like this: 'When God seems far away, guess who moved?' The truth is that God is always present to us, and we to him; it's just that we forget. How might you nurture your awareness of God's presence today?
4. How does God's constant nearness enable you to 'go the distance' in life?

Application

Talk to God about a situation where you do not often 'remember' his presence with you. Ask him what he is doing in that situation. Prayerfully consider what God-with-you will mean for your actions and attitudes in that situation.

Psalm 13 (Friday)

Pain may come to us in many forms: physical, emotional, relational, even psychological. But the common thing about all kinds of pain is that we just want it to stop, to be over and done with. We feel like crying out, 'How long must this go on?!' Psalm 13 records David's experience of waiting for the pain to be over.

Read Psalm 13 now.

1. What kind of pain is David suffering?
2. What might God be achieving in David's life by allowing him to suffer?
3. What does David's prayer teach us about talking to God when we are suffering?
4. Where is David's confidence?
5. How does this prayer, and others like it, help you to stay close to God, even in the worst of times?

So, is it wrong to question God? Not according to Psalm 13. We don't necessarily get answers to the 'how long?' questions; God doesn't open his plan book to our curious eyes. Instead we get something better: the Lord himself and his 'unfailing love' (v5).

A suggested prayer:

O Lord, what good would it do me if I did know the answers to the questions that burden my heart? You know what I really need—not more information, but more love; not your timetable, but your presence. Thank you for giving me yourself in Jesus Christ.
Amen.