



Songs in the Night Psalm 42

Do You Feel Thirsty for God?

I used to go to Russia every two years to teach about devotion to God and building a close life with Him. It was always an uplifting time for me. I loved being in Moscow as winter approached and was mesmerized by the crowds of people all about. Each time the collection of students I had was an inspiration. Nearly all were hungry for God and seemed quite interested in my lectures. It was a wonderful time of affirmation; that my studies and time spent with God was of value. One year, I became aware of how many of the students in my class had deep heartache and troubles, so I gave them time after one of my classes to come and meet with me for thirty minutes each. I thought only one or two of the students would show up but every one came and waited for the others to meet with me so they could have that time too. They shared heart breaking stories with me, painful troubles they faced and my friend Olga who served as translator patiently helped the students share their hearts. Many wept as we met, and each student thanked me deeply for the time. After the last student left and I prayed for each one, Olga and I were emotionally exhausted. It was quite a moment for us, a time I would not forget. Rarely have I felt so needed and appreciated. The joy of being used by God and feeling deeply His presence carried me home. When I worked my way back into my routines as pastor, I experienced a great sense of deflation. I felt unnecessary and unneeded, just someone fulfilling responsibilities rather than critical to the lives of the people in the church. Worse still, I lost something quite precious that carried me while I was in Russia, the closeness of God and sensitivity of His presence.

Have you ever had a great spiritual moment, a time when you felt the deep closeness of Jesus, felt that your place in the Kingdom of God mattered, had purpose and value, and then you lost it? Has your closeness to God ever slipped away? It has happened to me...maybe to you also. I used to think at these times in life that I was strange, an abnormal Christian. I have since discovered that this is what most people experience, maybe even all who have chosen the Christian path. Verse 5 of Psalm 42 is jolting if you expect Christianity to be a steady upward climb to happiness. **Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?** (Psalm 42: 5 NIV) Later the song writer describes the disconnect he felt with God. **I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?"** (Psalm 42 9a NIV) It is strange when this happens. You may not even realize it has taken place. Distance from God becomes normal, comfortable and like someone lost in the wilderness who does not realize how disoriented he or she is, you may not even notice how much you are missing.

There is deep sadness in Psalm 42 as the writer was well aware of what he once had and now didn't. **These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.** (Psalm 42: 4 NIV) He remembered a better time when he was excited about God. The songwriter was caught up in the passion of the crowd. The enthusiasm for the Lord and joy found in Him as everyone celebrated together reverberated from soul to soul and it multiplied the happiness of following such a great Savior. King David felt this rush of adrenaline as he worshipped with a great gathering of Israelites bringing the ark of the covenant to its new home in Jerusalem. **David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.** (2 Samuel 6: 14-15 NIV) His wife Michal, who held a deep seated grudge against David did not view her

husband's exuberance favorably. **As the ark of the Lord was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.** (2 Samuel 6: 16 NIV) When David got home, he and Michal got into a huge fight over his public enthusiasm for God and from that point, the marriage was as good as dead.

The drop-off between that great joy you had when Jesus meant everything to you and the hum drum existence of getting the diapers changed, cramming for final exams, trudging through a monotonous day at work or doing the laundry when everyone else is sitting around playing video games or watching TV can poison the Christian experience. Life can get super tedious and so can walking with God. There must be quite a few family fights that occur on the way to church services. Someone takes too long in the shower. An argument leads to shouting or cursing. The silent treatment because someone is mad. It happens all too often! The stress of getting breakfast together or everyone in the car makes it tough to worship and be happy about God. Many times it feels like we are just going through the motions of Christianity, barely keeping our heads above water as far as our faith goes. We can find ourselves in the same place spiritually as King Hezekiah.

Hezekiah had a rich history of faith. Early in his career he was a passionate lover of God. The Bible says this about him. **Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses.** (2 Kings 18:5-6 NIV) Later, Hezekiah and the people of Judah faced a great crisis when the massive army of Assyria came to wreck Jerusalem. Hezekiah's faith in God held though and the Lord miraculously destroyed the invading army. His faith in God was then legendary. His next crisis involved his health. The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah informed Hezekiah that his illness would soon take his life. Desperately, Hezekiah begged God to let him live and the Lord did, giving him fifteen more years. How would you respond to this great gift of God? Would your fervor for the Lord burn brighter or would it grow dim, knowing you were essentially living on borrowed time?

Hezekiah quit giving God much thought, didn't really reject Him, just stopped relying upon Him, turning to Him after that. There are perhaps hundreds of millions of Christians today in this same situation. They haven't stopped being Christian; they just don't have much Christianity in them. After Hezekiah recovered from his illness (because God healed him), a contingent of Babylonian emissaries came to Jerusalem to meet with Hezekiah and offer their congratulations on his restored health. Hezekiah was thrilled to meet them. He took the group on a complete tour of the city, showing them all his riches and the resources available to the Judean military. He was in fact bragging to the Babylonians about his great wealth. The prophet Isaiah approached Hezekiah afterward and told him that the Babylonians would one day become a great empire, and knowing now the wealth of Judah, come and destroy the nation. All Hezekiah wanted to know was if the nation would enjoy peace during his lifetime. He didn't care about the fate of his children or grandchildren, what would come of the people of Judah or even the Temple of God. He just wanted it to be ok for himself. What is more, he lost his fervor for God.

What happens when we drift from God, we stop paying attention to Him, we no longer have any passion for His word or for following Him? In varying degrees we become like Hezekiah. Our priorities get corrupted. We grow more selfish and self-centered. Our actions weaken the faith of others. We have no idea what God is saying to us and lose the wisdom the Lord offers. We make bad mistakes that have lasting ramifications when we aren't close to God. Decisions seem reasonable at the time, but God only knows the long term effects. With Him guiding us from both the Bible and the Holy Spirit working through Christian friends in the Church as well as the quiet voice of God in our spirit, we can make the most of this life, be successful in the things that matter. For those who realize the truly important matters in life, this part of our song is precious. **As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.** (Psalm 42:1 NIV) Perhaps you aren't yet panting after God, but if you would take the time to drink from His stream, joy and peace and direction will come to you that is supernatural. We have a great and wonderful Savior!