



Christian Crusaders

7401 University Ave., Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613-5099
(319) 277-0924 – TOLL-FREE 1-888-693-2484

www.christiancrusaders.org

My Soul Thirsts

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Rev. Lee laaveg

TEXT: Psalm 42 (NASB)

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence. O my God, my soul is in despair within me; therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan and the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; all Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me. The Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime; and His song will be with me in the night, a prayer to the God of my life.

I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, while they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

Dear friends:

Grace and peace to you in the name of God our Father and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I begin with this question: does your soul thirst for God? As human beings, our souls are our unique capacity to, in spiritual essence, know the living God – the One who hung the stars and planets in place, orbiting over the sun. Are you thirsty to know the power of God, to know the love of God, or the presence of His spirit with you? The psalmist writes: “as the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul thirsts for You.” [Saint] Augustine [of Hippo] once wrote “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.” The Jewish writer Elie Wiesel, in his well-known book *Night*, describes his boyhood experiences during World War II as one of the countless victims in the Holocaust. Ripped from his home, and separated from everyone in his family except his father (who would later die in the death camps), Wiesel suffered a “dark night of the soul” as few would experience. It challenges views and beliefs about God. Wiesel’s innocence and faith became sacrifices on the altar of man's evil and sin’s darkness. It isn’t always easy to feel connected to God, is it? Gerhard Frost, however, in his book *The Color of the Night*, writes this: “suffering is not peripheral but central to human existence. And to avoid situations of pain is to condemn oneself to the shallows of life. And God goes before us, still calling ‘Follow Me.’”

So we understand the psalmist who compares our soul’s first to be connected to the love of God with the deer that pants when it’s chased by the hunters through the woods. A. W. Tozer, in his book *Knowledge of the Holy*, writes:

We live in a world hot in pursuit of quenching its thirst with everything but God. That's because we seek satisfaction in the wrong ways and in the wrong things. We run too hard chasing mirages that cannot satisfy. We get stuck in the mud in ruts of destructive behaviors that imprison us. We live in a culture that glorifies booze and drugs and sex without consequence. We chase fame or power or wealth. We purchase all kinds of toys to distract us. We want prestige, but in the end we’re left empty.

You ever heard U2 sing the song “Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For”? Bono, the lead singer of U2, says it's a song about every heart’s longing for God. The lyrics read [paraphrased]:

I’ve climbed mountains and run through fields, scaled city walls, and I’m still running because I still haven't found what I’m looking for. I’ve kissed on the lips and spoken with devils, but I still haven't found what I’m looking for. I believe in

the kingdom come, where colors bleed into one. You broke the bonds, You loosed the chains, You carry the cross of my shame.
It's a haunting lyric, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

There's an ancient tale from the country of India about a young man who was seeking God, and he went to a wise old sage for help.

"How can I find God?" he asked the old man.

The old man took him to a nearby river. Out they waded into the deep water. Soon the water was up just under their chins. Suddenly, the old man sees the young man by the neck and pushed them under of the water. He held the young man down until the young man was flailing the water in desperation. Another minute and the young man may have drowned. Up out the water the two of them came, and the young man was coughing water from his lungs. And, still gasping for air and reaching the bank, he turned and looked at the old man and said indignantly "what'd that have to do with my finding God?"

The old man asked him quietly, "while you were under the water, what did you want more than anything else?"

The young man thought briefly and said "I wanted air. I wanted air more than anything else."

And the old man replied "when you want God as much as you wanted air, you will find Him."

We need to thirst for God like a drowning man craves air.

There are many biblical figures who thirsted for God. Do you remember when Moses, from the mountaintop, prayed "Lord, show me your glory"? Do you remember when the prophet Elisha said to his mentor Elijah, just before the Lord took Elijah to Heaven in a fiery chariot, "Give me a double portion of your spirit," which, of course, would be the Holy Spirit. Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord all through the night, and he repeatedly said "I'll not let you go, I pray you bless me." Do you hear the desperate passion to know God? And who can forget the New Testament story of Saul the spiritual zealot? The terrorist, who supported the stoning of Stephen and harassed and imprisoned many of the followers of Jesus, until he met Jesus himself on the road to Damascus. And his life was totally changed because he met the living Christ. Here's what he wrote in Philippians 3: "I've suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. That I might have the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." My soul thirsts for God – it's the only place I'll be truly satisfied.

But the psalmist, in Psalm 42, also writes about "walking in the darkness" or struggling with despair. You remember of the song Simon and Garfunkel used to sing? "Hello

darkness my old friend, I've come to talk with you again." So the psalmist says "soul, why are you cast down in despair? I used to lead the procession of praise with joy and thanksgiving into the house of the Lord, and now I drink my sorrow. I drink my tears." What kind of personal trauma or tragedy do you suppose of the writer experienced that turned his life upside down, to push him into dark despair?

One of the things might be fear. Fear can seize us by the throat and paralyze us, leaving us overwhelmed and powerless. We realize we're at the end of ourselves. I want to remind you of what David wrote in Psalm 27, he said "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life, of what shall I be afraid? In spite of this, I will be confident. One thing I've asked the Lord and that I seek: that I might dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Our fears can paralyze us. Our nation, and our world right now, is affected by an illness – the coronavirus – and it is an imposing threat which instills fear in the hearts of people. We don't want to contract the disease. We certainly do not wish to die. In correspondence to that illness that has a rampant fear, that paranoia is impacting the world's economy, and the investment portfolios of many people are plunging as a result. What are we going to do with our anxiety and with our fear? What we do when we feel dissatisfied or discouraged or disillusioned? Where do we turn? The psalmist says "Hope in God."

Another reason that we can be pushed to the point of despair is a sense of being betrayed. Somebody has lied to us, somebody has violated our covenant with them, somebody has violated our personal trust, somebody has unfairly "flipped" on us and "thrown us under the bus," so to speak. When we feel betrayed we lose our capacity to trust, and we can despair.

A third source of walking in darkness, like Wiesel's "dark night of the soul," is pain. It might be physical or emotional or relational, but pain can throw us for a loop.

The fourth reason that, many times the human experience, we can be pushed into despair so dark that we can't just think happy thoughts and will ourselves out is the death of the dear one. When we lose a loved one, especially prematurely or tragically by accident, when we stand by the grave of someone that we have cherished, the grief is palpable. How are we going to get past it? The psalmist says "Hope in God."

The fifth and final reason I want to list today for why we might journey into despair, walking in darkness, is our own moral failure. If we fall in some terrible sin, the consequences of that choice to our relationship with God and with other people might be more than we can bear. And then you throw in the fact that the enemy, Satan, wants to taunt us in the darkness. "Where is your God? How to God help you now?" Satan, in

the midst of our darkness, wants us to despair to the extent that we can no longer see the future, and we lose hope, and our faith dies. I take heart in the verse in 2 Timothy 2:13, where we read "If we are faithless, God remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself."

If you're in the darkness today, if you're struggling with despair, if you're depressed, I encourage you to cry out to God. "Hope in God." Let the prayer of your heart confess your fears and your despair. We walk in darkness, but we do battle with prayer and the promises of God's word. Do you remember what Jeremiah the prophet wrote in Lamentations 3? "This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord's loving kindness never ceases. God's compassions never fails. They are fresh and new every morning." The focus of our eyes has to be on God and not from the source of our fears or the source of our despair.

Finally, in the midst of the darkness, I want to say to you boldly that the person of Jesus makes it all different. Jesus understands our human emotion and our human experiences. Jesus is the One who said "I am the light of the world." John 1 says "The light shines into our darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it." A quote we read says "better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." Jesus understands our human experiences. Hebrews 4 says "we don't have a high priest unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One has been tested in all things as we are. Yet He was without sin."

The second reason that Jesus makes our darkness different is that Jesus not only went to the cross to bear our sins, but to enter into our darkness so that we are never alone. No matter how dark the journey of your life become, Jesus whispers to you "I'm right here with you. I'm right here." In the Psalms it says "even the darkness is not dark to Thee, O Lord."

The third reason Jesus makes it all different is that He has broken the power of sin and death and the devil. So, we live our journey of faith from a position of victory. We don't live the journey in order to gain victory, that's already been won, and we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us.

The fourth reason that Jesus makes it all different is that He is the fountain of life. He is the living water springing up to give us new beginnings, and the hope that tomorrow does not have to be a continuation of our past struggles. If we thirst in our souls for God, then Jesus is our living water.

And finally, Jesus makes it all different because He is the source of joy. God penetrates our darkness to shine with His love so that we can walk as people of hope.

May the Lord bless you in the light of His love, as your soul thirsts for God. Let His light shine in your darkness, and give you joy.

Amen.