

Psalm 42:1-4

1 As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?" 4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival (NRSV).

Psalms is known to be most comforting of scripture. It is a collection of prayers and songs to praise God. Today's Scripture reflects the despair and hope of a Godly man who has a common spiritual ailment. He is lapsed and in his desperate position he thirsts for God and longs for temple worship. He imagines a thirsty deer that comes to a creek only to find that it is dry. This is his plight. This is the extent of his despondency.

Let's look at the person writing the Psalter. We do not know the status of his community or the reason for his position whether he is lapsed or exiled. What we do now is that this person is a man of faith. He does not question who God is. He knows that God is the one true God. He knows that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He knows that God is alive and that God sustains us. However, the person thinks that God has left him. We do not have the background information so that we knew what it was that separated him from God. The problem is not that God is absent; something else has happened in this person's life. As you know, the Bible is about the relationship between God and the people. It is important for us to realize that whenever that relationship is interrupted it is not because of God as many who are lapsed prefer to assume. He is now longing for God. He is getting back to God with a strong desire. The psalmist is not only saddened and desires God but also desires the temple of God. The temple is a special place, a sanctuary, a place of reverence, a place that is specifically built for people to get closer to God and feel God's presence. It is specifically reserved as a holy place.

For the contemporary lesson we will look at this Scripture from the perspective of an individual that has lapsed. I see a very common pattern within mainstream contemporary society. Things go well for most people in a prosperous economy and a lot of people take God for granted. Along with prosperity many lose their devotion and stop worshipping God. Oh, they still believe, but they are not faithful. They are lapsed. Then all of a sudden life drops a bomb on them. They are left in tears, frustrated, and overwhelmed. It seems like nothing goes right as they are broken down in the middle of life's road. It is then, when they are down and out, they begin to long for God. This is very common in society today. It is also a repeat cycle of prosperity, transgression, despair, repentance, and praise and worship that is covered within the Bible. Whenever someone is lost and gets back to a life of faith they find a spiritual renewal full of peace and happiness. People that live a life of faith still have challenges, frustrations, and setbacks, but everything seems to come together for them.

I remember one particular time when I had the opportunity to engage in a conversation with a lapsed Christian that was troubled. Knowing that the person was absent from a life of faith and struggling in life I asked "Why are you a Christian? There was a very long pause as she reflected on the question that she could not answer. I said

“we really need to think about this” and asked the question again “Why are you a Christian?” After another long pause she answered “that is how I was raised.” She was troubled because she was lapsed. She fell from God because of reckoning; she lacked the substance, the understanding, the evaluation, and the reasoning. She did not take the time to reflect on the significance of whom and what God is, and what God has done for us. Since the substance is not there, then there is no appreciation for what God has done. Without that appreciation there is no life of devotion. So what we have is a detailed and complex spiritual problem. People are troubled because they are lapsed. They are lapsed because there is no appreciation. They fail to appreciate God because they have not reflected on God. The spiritual influences in our lives that are supposed to make us into disciples have failed us. So then I asked “What makes Christianity special?” There was another long pause. Finally she answered “I don’t know.” I explained “what makes Christianity special is God reaching through the cosmos to give to us the very best gift that God has to offer. Once you realize that and truly realize the significance of what that means, then out of appreciation you lead a life of devotion and experience a spiritual revival.” A renewed life of devotion is a life of happiness and wellbeing instead of life of troubles.

We have many disciples in this ministry. Faithful keep the church functioning by working tirelessly behind the scenes. They do not complain because they enjoy engaging in ministry and missions. What makes ministry such a wonderful joy is because it is a pleasure to serve God. They appreciate what God has done for us.

Do not take God for granted. Do not take God’s religion for granted. Do not take the church that Jesus built for granted. Longing for God is a necessary step of faith. It is very important for all of us to do the soul searching and reflection to know who and what God is, and what God has done for us.