

Exodus

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if you would turn back, turn my volume, that's good, turn back in your Bibles to Psalm 105, page 503, 504, long psalm this morning.

And we read it in three chunks, which I thought a couple of weeks ago was a great idea, but now I think it's a disaster because we lost the train of thought, didn't we? Well, I did.

You might have kept it going. Well, we come back to the Psalms this time of the year every year because they're so full of treasure and riches. There is no human condition, no human emotion or experience that's not reflected in the Psalms.

But the Psalms, as we've experienced, don't leave us where they find us. They're not just a reflection of our experience of God, they're the revelation of God to us. And they change us in our experience, whether it's suffering or sorrow or delight or joy or grief or loss or boredom.

And the way the Psalms do that is through spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are practical skills that God gives us for how to grow deep and strong into the people God's made us to be.

[1 : 23] We cultivate spiritual disciplines as a sort of antidote from shallowness and superficiality coming along the surface of life. And they, as we practice them, they bring who we are inside and who we are outside closer to together.

And I'm speaking about spiritual disciplines. I keep going in and out. If you can hear half of this, it'll be terrific. I'm talking about reading the Bible and praying and meeting with God's people and all the other means of grace.

And in Psalm 105, David, King David, gives us the one spiritual discipline that lies underneath every other spiritual discipline.

This is the essential and indispensable thing we must do. Otherwise, your Christian life is going to be a complete waste of time. And it is this.

It is seeking the face of God in everything that we do. And you can see it a little bit from the shape of the Psalm. So I don't know if this is, we probably lost this in the reading, but verses 1 to 6 is like a fire hydrant of happy commands, breathless happy commands.

[2 : 34] Give thanks, call upon, make known, sing, sing, sing, tell glory. And then verses 7 to 45 shows how you do it. And right in the middle of 10 wild, happy commands, there is a shift in verse 3.

Second half of verse 3. It's near the top of page 504 if you look down at it. David says this, Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

And then he says, Here it is.

This is the spiritual discipline. He's not saying, he doesn't say go to God and ask for forgiveness, a good thing to do. He's not saying ask for help. He's not saying go to God and ask him to change your circumstances.

He's saying go to God and ask for God. Seek God himself. Because if we have God, we have everything.

[3 : 38] And this is the spiritual discipline that lies under everything else. This is the opposite of drifting along, coasting along, just being carried by circumstances. It's setting my heart and my mind and my affections on God.

It's deliberately choosing to focus my thoughts on him, seeking him, savoring him. And it's this that gives life to everything else we do as Christians.

In fact, apart from seeking the face of God, serving God will always be a bit of a chore. Reading the Bible is like, why am I doing this?

I'm squatting for an exam. Prayer will be dry and hard work as I give to God my current shopping list as quickly as I can. Coming to church will be about making me happy.

And you'll serve other people and you'll serve in the kingdom of God so long as you get something out of it. And you'll never be a Christian who takes any risks. So how does it work?

[4 : 44] What does it mean to seek God? And what King David does from verse 7 to the end of the psalm is he takes the Bible, takes two books of the Bible, and he turns them back into prayer to God.

This is very important. So there are two kinds of prayer. One is asking God. God urges us to ask him and to bring everything to him. But there's a different kind of prayer where we take what God has revealed in the scriptures and we speak it back to God in prayer and meditation.

We take what he said and revealed and we move toward him in our hearts, speaking to him and seeking him. So what I'd like to do is take the three key phrases of seeking God and show how they work a little bit in this psalm.

There's a lot in it. And each phrase goes deeper than the one before. So I've got three points and they're all to do with seeking. So point number one comes from the second half of verse 3.

Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. This is the place. This is the place to start. And it is the place to start because it's knowing that seeking God is the key to joy.

[5 : 57] Now how does David know that it's going to end in joy? How can he be so sure that if we seek God with all our hearts, it's going to bring us joy? And the answer is that as David prays the scriptures, it's as clear as the nose on his face that God is seeking us.

Every day, in every way, throughout history, God is seeking us. That's the way it's been. So as I say, he takes these two books of the Bible, Genesis and Exodus, and he turns them around and he shows how God has been seeking us.

So take Exodus, verses 24 to 44, the great rescue from slavery in Egypt. Did you notice when that was read, so well read, that God is the actor in almost every phrase?

Do you notice that? Verse 24, he made, he made, he turned, he sent, he chose, he sent, he turned, he spoke, he saved, he rescued. And it's not just sovereign power, but it's full of love and kindness and undeserved grace, because in seeking his people, he then satisfies their needs, verse 39.

He spread a cloud for their covering, fire to give light by night. They asked, he brought quail, quail, and gave them bread from heaven in abundance.

[7 : 15] He opened the rock and water gushed out. It flowed through the desert like a river. And when he sought them out, when God seeks people out and rescues them, their weakness and their unattractiveness made absolutely no difference to him.

Do you notice that in verse 12? It didn't matter that they were small and vulnerable and despised. It's always been that way. It's the same way today.

I mean, I could have said, look around you in church today, but I just, I don't want to do that. Go to any other church and look around. God chooses what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chooses what is low and despised. Even those things are not to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being can boast in the presence of God. Or as Eugene Peterson translates it, it makes it quite clear that none of you can get by by blowing your own horn before God.

If you're going to blow a horn, blow a trumpet for God. I think that nicely captures it. That's what happened with Abraham. He was old. He was past childbearing age, as was his wife.

[8 : 22] There was nothing in Abraham that was promising. He wasn't even a believer for heaven's sake. He was worshipping the moon. God sought him out. God took the initiative and created a bond so close, it's so deep, it's beyond anything we can quite understand.

Look back in verse 8. Listen to these words. God remembers his covenant forever. The word that he commanded a thousand generations. The covenant that he made with Abraham.

His sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statue, to Israel as an everlasting covenant. This is the language of love.

Closest we get to this as humans is in marriage. I take you to be my wife, to love and to cherish till death do us part. But, you know, our promises are weak.

They don't have the power of God's promises. But God comes to us and he sets his love on us, made us, and if we could just imagine one millimeter of the depth of God for us, it would probably just lay us on our backs.

[9 : 33] So when we seek God, love God, joy in God, it's because he has sought us and he has loved us and he takes joy in us and he has bound himself to us by his word.

And he says about us, he says, those people, they're mine. I've set them aside for me. I've given them my word. Verse 15, they're my anointed ones, my prophets.

That's why David says, let the hearts of all those who seek the Lord rejoice. Plural. Because you see, the fact that God is seeking us creates a community.

I have a friend in Australia who loves music, has different tastes than me, but whenever I go and see him in Australia, he'll always, he said, Dave, come, I want to play you this track.

And then he plays me 10. And I enjoy it because I enjoy his joy in it. But when you know, and that's as much as I'm going to say about it.

[10:41] When you know the love of God, when you know the love of God for you, you just have to grab someone else and say, look at this, not so much for their sake, but because the experience of the love of God produces the kind of joy that's only complete when you involve someone else in it.

This is the first and fundamental description in the psalm of what it is to be a believer. Literally, a seeker in the Lord. Let the seekers in the Lord rejoice.

This is our identity. And what that means is that you cannot be a true Christian. You can't be a real Christian apart from seeking God with all your heart. It's not just seeking him for the good that he can give you.

It's seeking him. Let the hearts of those who seek him rejoice. Okay, that's point one. Point two, what does that mean? How does it work? How do we do that?

And there's the second seek phrase in verse four. Seek the Lord and his strength. Now, why do we need the strength of the Lord to seek him?

[11:46] And I think there are three separate reasons. And the first is we just don't do it naturally. It's an entirely supernatural thing to happen.

So if you do find yourself loving and seeking the Lord, it's a supernatural thing in your heart. Yes, it is my intentional and deliberate choice, but I need his help and his power to be able to do it.

In the New Testament, in the book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writing from prison, writing to Christians who are in difficult circumstances, writes down what he prays for them.

I'm almost tempted to turn you to this passage. I won't do it, but let me read it to you. This is the prayer. He says that, According to the riches of God's glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, it's complicated, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may feel the full of God.

Very kind friend gave this to me this morning on the way to church. He's just been to Australia.

[13:13] It's Vegemite. And I can give someone a taste afterwards if you really need to. Now, this is unlike anything else in the world.

This is the richest source of vitamin B available to humans. It's made from hops, but that's another story. And it's absolutely delicious. And you can hear about it, and you can hear how fabulous it tastes, but until you taste it, you really don't know.

So you see, Christ already dwells in our hearts by faith, yeah? We already have some comprehension of the love of Christ. But such is the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ that we need to be strengthened with his power in our hearts to really experience it for ourselves.

He's not talking about emotion. He's not talking about feeling it, because it's possible to have the most dramatic emotional experience and not change your heart to become like Christ. But since there is always infinitely more to God and his wonder and his goodness and his love, and he is so much better than life itself and more glorious than we can imagine, we need the power of God to help us seek him and to understand.

It's supernatural. That's the first reason we need his power. The second reason we need his strength is because we're so easily distractible. We all of us suffer from a kind of a spiritual ADHD.

[14:54] You know, we're all like spiritual Labradors in a chocolate factory. You know, there's good nutritious dog food here, but we, you know, race off and eat so many chocolates, it'll kill us.

And we are training ourselves in increasing distractibility with our screens and social media. Now, babies are distractible as well. We have a three-month-old in our family right now, a perfect grandchild.

She's perfect. Have I said that before? She's perfect. And we were over the other night, and there were five adults around her. One was reading, and she was just, she was looking around. She was

just, you know, any noise, anything.

And then her mother, who was sitting two seats up from her, stood up, and the baby's eyes glommed onto mum and followed her all the way out of the room because mum is more than all the world to her right now.

That's the way it ought to be for us and the Lord. You know, some of the things we seek are good, exercise, sleep, whatever. Some are bad. But there's only one who deserves to be sought with all our hearts, only one who deserves our love and worship.

[16:00] There's only one who can ultimately satisfy you, and it's God himself. There's nothing else. There's no one else who can. No fame or position or sex or marriage, partner or money, and we know this.

But there's a third reason that we need to seek his strength, and we come back to the psalm here, and that is we do not get a pass from suffering and evil.

And that's why the Joseph verses 16 to 22 are very important. Do you notice as we work through those verses, reflecting on Genesis, that the first 30 years of Joseph's life were an absolute disaster.

He was the youngest of 12 brothers, and he was a tattletale. You know, his older brothers weren't performing well, so he'd report them to his father in front of the older brothers, make him popular. And then God gave him dreams that his brothers would one day bow down to him, and Joseph boasted about it, and his brothers hated him. So they made a plan to kill him. And when he was 17, they took him out to a field, and they dug a pit, and just before they killed him, one of the brothers intervened and said, you know, we could make some money out of this.

[17:14] Let's sell him to some slave traders, which they did, and he was trafficked out of Canaan down into Egypt, where he worked as a slave, until the woman of the house took a fancy to him.

And when he refused her sexual advances, she falsely accused him of rape, and he ended up in Egyptian prison, which is not so much different from Egyptian prisons today. Now, if you read the story in the last 10 chapters of Genesis, again and again and again, it says the Lord was with Joseph.

The Lord was with Joseph. And you want to say, really? This is a disaster. This is terrible. And he endured these things, and he continued to seek the Lord in all of them.

So when he refuses the sexual advances of his master's wife, the reason he gives is this. He says, how can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? There was no one else in the house.

And even in prison, the Lord was with him, who gave him the ability to interpret dreams with fellow prisoners. And still he remained in prison year after year after year, until he was finally brought out, interpreted dreams from Pharaoh.

[18:26] Pharaoh made him prime minister of the country, and he saved Egypt from famine. And then Canaan, he saved the people in Canaan, including his own brothers and family from the famine.

And his brothers came to Egypt and bowed down before him as he had seen. But here's the point that David makes, verse 17. He doesn't hide the pain and suffering and injustice of Joseph.

See, he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. His feet were hurt with fetters. His neck was put in a collar of iron until what he had said came to pass.

The word of the Lord tested him. All of this was part of the plan of God, and we don't know why exactly. But we do know that through Joseph's suffering, God was rescuing his people, and that's how they came to live in Egypt.

And later on, when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, this famous verse, he said to them, do not fear. He says, am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

[19:36] It's just the same for us. We don't always know the why of our suffering. We rarely do, I think. But we do know that God is bringing all things under the feet of Jesus Christ, and he is partly doing that through our suffering, and so we need to seek him in our suffering and his strength.

We need to seek him there as much as in success. It's wonderful, isn't it? There's nothing phony or sentimental about seeking God. I mean, the West Coast way is, you know, every cloud has a silver lining, and we're so easily taken in by anything that's positive.

And where there's a Christian version of this, if I live really hard for Jesus, he'll, you know, he'll make my life go well. But if you pray the Bible back to God, you cannot escape its realism.

Joseph sought the Lord, and it didn't go fine. He bore scars on his neck and on his feet for all his life. You cannot assume you're going to have a happy family life.

But you can know that even in the midst of the worst things that happen, if you seek God and his power, there's nothing in all creation that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That's why, that's why this seeking God is such an important discipline.

[20 : 48] There is nothing else that can carry you through the deepest waters or the fiercest flame. God alone, he can, he will. And in the middle of ferocious difficulty, the most important thing that we can do is to seek God and seek his strength.

And when we do, it's amazing how somehow the circumstances let go of us a little bit, and we grow closer to him, and we prove his goodness. So how do we seek God and his strength?

And I come to the third and final point. Verse four, David says, and this is the third thing, seek his presence continually.

This is where we've been going. This is the heart of it. In the original, presence is face. Seek his face continually. Here is a command and an invitation from God to seek his person, to seek his face, because face is the relational door to the person.

It's the place we know someone. It's the place of give and take. You know, if you're speaking to someone about something that's important to you, and they turn their face away, you're going to, it's going to communicate something. And if you're speaking about something, and the person turns their face toward you, that communicates something.

[22 : 09] God is not just some transcendental divine being force. He is a person who desires intimate relation with us. And this is the heart of this spiritual discipline. It's seeking his face ongoingly, day by day, in everything we do, in every circumstance.

But there's an obvious problem, isn't there? Because outside the Garden of Eden, the face of God is terrifying. We're so turned in on ourselves by sin, that we read in the Old Testament, if we were to see the face of God literally, we would die.

But we are reading Psalm 105 today, and we know more than David did. We are reading it on the other side, of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. David knew he was writing as a prophet, leaning forward to the coming of Jesus, serving us by writing the Psalm.

And when Jesus came, he said, if you have seen me, you've seen the Father. And we now see the brightness of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus.

In Jesus, God cannot be clearer, and he cannot be closer, because Jesus is the perfect image, and representation of God. He's full of God's grace, he's full of God's truth.

[23 : 26] All the fullness of God, dwells in his human body. And Jesus came, to give us the face of the Father. And when he dies on the cross, for our sins, on the cross, God the Father, turns his face away, from the Son of God, because of our sins, so that he can now turn his smile, on all of those, who are in Jesus Christ.

And it's there, in the cross of Jesus Christ, we see the face of God, and the smile of God, most clearly. And the way we grow deeper, and the way we grow stronger, and more like Christ, is as we seek out, and look at, and constantly behold, the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.

We do that, it changes everything. I mean, it changes Bible reading, from just accumulating knowledge, to becoming something alive, and meat, and drink.

And when we pray, if we're seeking the face of God, when we pray, it prevents our prayers, from becoming the boring shopping list. And it also means, our prayers will be filled with praise.

Not just thanks. Thanks are good, but when we thank God, we're thanking him, for things that he does for us. But praise, is for who God is in himself.

[24 : 46] Seeking the face of God, I think is the key, to non-paranoid parenting. I was going to say, non-anxious parenting, but I don't think that's possible. You know, without seeking the face of God, we either want to control our children, or we're afraid of them.

Seeking the face of God, in conflict, changes conflict. Instead of trying to win, or be right, if I'm seeking the face of God, in conflict with someone else, it can be a time for growth, for me and for you.

It's the key to forgiveness. Seeking the face of Christ, when you've been wronged, is way better than vengeance, and revenge. It doesn't make it any easier, but it opens the door, of the prison. When you're serving Christ, seeking Christ, seeking Christ, in the serving, prevents you, from manipulating others. It prevents you, from being all needy, of their approval.

And even when you want, to do something wonderful, God, if you're not seeking Christ, in it, you're just doing it, for yourself. And when we come, to decision making, if you're not seeking, Christ above everything else, or the face of God, in Jesus Christ, you'll be seeking yourself, or money, or something, you're not aware of.

[26 : 04] So brothers and sisters, seek the face of God, in Jesus Christ. Do you know, over the past few years, we finished the service, and one of us says, a blessing at the back.

The blessing I say, eight times out of ten, is the one from, the book of Numbers. And I say it, because it's about, the face of God. Remember it goes like this, the Lord bless you, and keep you. The Lord make his face, shine on you, and the shining, is his goodness, and his love, and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up, the light of his face, countenance on you, and give you peace, now and always.

So seek God, the glory of God, in the face of Christ, in everything you do, in conversation, in driving, in working, in relaxing, that's a word to some of us, in loving, in how you do things, and let the hearts of those, who seek the Lord rejoice.

Amen. Amen.