



Thirsty
Psalm 42

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Some of the best theologians are children. Here are some sentence prayers some children wrote to God.

- Jamie – “Dear God, thank you for the baby brother but I asked for a puppy. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up.”
- Charlie – “Dear God, I bet it’s really hard for you to love everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in my family and I can’t do it.”
- Ian – “Dear God, I like the story about Noah best of all. You really made up some good ones.”
- Katie – “Dear God, did you mean for giraffes to look like that or was it an accident?”
- Peter – “Dear God, I really am doing the best I can.”

God appears in every culture in the world. This “itch for God,” as one writer called it, is universal.¹ Throughout history, cultures have invented thousands of religions. There is this universal feeling that there is a higher power.² But where does that feeling come from?

Dean Hamer is a molecular biologist at the National Institute of Health. He is also the author of *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired Into Our Genes*.³ Hamer asserts that “every thought we think and every feeling is the result of activity in the brain.” He believes that spirituality is governed by chemicals in the brain and that “humans inherit a predisposition to be spiritual – to reach out and look for a higher being.” He believes that just as some people are more creative than others, some people are more spiritual than others, and that it is all “preloaded in the genome.”⁴ Dr. Hamer does not believe that God really exists, it’s that we need Him to exist because we are the only species able to contemplate our own death.

We would disagree with Dr. Hamer’s conclusion, but he’s right about one thing. The concept of God is built-in. Romans 1:19 confirms it. “What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them” (NIV). For us, God is not an imaginary friend. For us, He is the majestic Creator of the universe, the sovereign King who reigns over every nation, every event, and every person. He is holy, perfect, and eternal. And He is our Father, He loves us, and He invites us to walk with Him.

The Bible dares to describe our interaction with God as a walk. That means, our pursuit is not just right theology about God. Our pursuit is knowing God and experiencing a personal, intimate, day-by-day, and moment-by-moment relationship with Him.

Biblical writers talked about pursuing God, craving God, and thirsting for God. And the intensity of a person’s pursuing and craving and thirsting depends on what that person thinks about God. Who is God? Why do we need Him? The answers to those questions determine a person’s thirst and pursuit of God. So the question today is, *how thirsty are you for God?*

This morning, we are going to look at Psalm 42 and what it means to thirst for God. *The marvelous truth is that the majestic Creator of the universe invites us to walk with Him, and Psalm 42 reminds us that only God can satisfy the thirst of the human soul.*

SPIRITUAL THIRST

Psalm 42 paints a picture of spiritual thirst. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:1-2, NIV).⁵ Can you see that picture? A deer on the run. Out of breath, desperate for water. That’s a picture of thirst.

In other psalms, David described his thirst for God. Listen to David and ask yourself if this sounds like your thirst for God.

- “O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water” (Psalm 63:1, NLT).
- “My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:2, NIV).
- “With all my heart I have sought You” (Psalm 119:10, NAS).
- “I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands” (Psalm 119:131, NIV).
- “I stretch out my hands to You; my soul longs for You” (Psalm 143:6, NAS).

Does that describe your thirst for God? Did you and a friend have lunch this week and talk about thirsting for God like that? Did your family talk about that around the dinner table this week?

Let me make sure we understand something. Doing all the right things is not the same as thirsting for God. Believing all the right things is not the same as thirsting for God. Thirsting for God is not about activity or doctrine or morality. *It’s about a person.*

The great pastor A. W. Tozer grieved the fact that so few Christians in his day seemed to experience the presence of God.⁶ For too many, Tozer observed, God was nothing more than words on a page. To which he wrote in his classic book *The Pursuit of God*, “It is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God Himself.”⁷ In other words, don’t reduce God to an academic exercise. Tozer added, “The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring us to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that we may enter into Him, that we may delight in His presence, and taste and know the inner sweetness of God Himself in the core and center of our hearts.”⁸ Then Tozer warned, “Christians are in real danger of losing God ... (because) we have almost forgotten that God is a person.”⁹

We’re talking about walking with God. Adam and Eve walked with God “in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). The Bible says, “Enoch walked with God” (Genesis 5:24). “Noah was a righteous man ... and walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). Abraham was called a “friend of God” (James 2:23). “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his

friend” (Exodus 33:11, ESV). And God said to Israel, “I will walk among you and be your God” (Leviticus 26:12). Again and again, the Bible describes our interaction with the majestic Creator of the universe as a walk!

God is not a concept; He is personal. We’re talking about having a personal relationship with Him. But how personal? How intimate? How interactive? What is this relationship supposed to look like?

Let me distinguish between three types of relationships. First, is the relationship we have with each other. We can see, hear, and touch each other. Our relationship is a physical, space-time relationship.

Second, is our relationship with Abraham Lincoln. We know a lot about Lincoln, but only because we’ve read about him. None of us has ever met him, shaken his hand, heard him speak, or sat across the table and had a conversation with him. We do not have a physical, space-time relationship with Abraham Lincoln. Our relationship with Lincoln is an historical relationship.

Third, is our relationship with God. Our relationship with God is not a physical, space-time relationship, and neither is it merely an historical relationship. Our relationship with God is a spiritual relationship, a faith relationship. We see Him, and hear Him, and walk with Him by faith, and not by sight or sound or touch. As Paul said, we “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). It is through faith that we “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). And this faith relationship is real because the Holy Spirit, God Himself, lives within us.

We’re talking about walking with a personal God. We’re talking about thirsting for a person. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2, NIV).

SPIRITUAL DESPERATION

Is our thirst for God as intense as that of the author of Psalm 42? If not, then why not?

The surface answer is that we’re distracted by so many things. The deeper answer is that we have fallen in love with ourselves and our own lives. Life is all about us. It’s about our work, our families, our calendars, our money, our comfort. The distraction which keeps us from craving God is self. We are increasingly self-absorbed and self-sufficient. We can’t see God because we’re so focused on ourselves.

So, to get our attention, *God often uses problems and pain to arouse spiritual desperation.* In other words, we aren’t that desperate for God until things go wrong.

Listen to the author of Psalm 42 pour out his heart to God. “My tears have been my food day and night ... Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? ... O my God, my soul is in despair ... Why have You forgotten me? ... Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? ... (Psalm 42:3-11, NIV). We don’t know the circumstances that led to this despair, but we do know it was real.

The Hebrew word for “downcast” or “despair” is both emotional and physical. It means to bring someone to their knees, to collapse under the burden, to be both emotionally and physically overwhelmed. It’s when circumstances knock the breath out of you. But this word also paints the picture of conquering a nation, of conquering a king. So, the word carries the idea of knocking the arrogant off their pedestal. It means to depedestalize.¹⁰ To knock the arrogance out of a person. We tend not to thirst for God as much when life is good, and when life is good, we tend to become self-reliant and proud. That’s why the Lord warned the Hebrews,

“Remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart ... Beware that you do not forget ... then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt ... Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’ ” (Deuteronomy 8:2, 11, 14, 17).

When we are self-absorbed and self-sufficient, we can go days without praying, days without reading the Bible, and days without even thinking about God. And that’s when God uses problems and pain to get our attention and to show us how desperate and how dependent we really are.

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God.” And what happens if we don’t? Let me illustrate it by what happens when we don’t drink enough water.

Overall, the human body is 60% water. Our skin is 64% water. The heart is 75% water. The brain is 83% water. Our kidneys and lungs are 85% water. A person needs to drink a gallon of water a day to stay healthy. If not, the consequences become increasingly dangerous. The first signs of dehydration are fatigue, dizziness, and a headache. After a day of dehydration, a person will notice shriveled skin and experience muscle cramps and joint pain. After two days, organs in the body start to fight over water, sucking water from the bloodstream. Blood becomes thicker and harder to pump through the body, causing low blood pressure and forcing the heart to work harder. Fever, delirium, and severe diarrhea or vomiting will follow. By day three, the brain will swell, and a person will experience seizures and hypovolemic shock. Finally, kidney failure, coma, and death.

Here’s another way to see it. This is what happens to a plant without water. Within a matter of days, the leaves wither and the plant will die. The same thing happens to the soul when we neglect time with God.

SPIRITUAL HOPE

If you don’t want that to happen to you, then listen to Psalm 42. Only God can satisfy the thirst of the human heart. The author of Psalm 42 was convinced of that. “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; **therefore I will remember you ...**” (Psalm 42:5-6, NIV).

“I will remember.” The thirst returns when we remember. *It is God’s faithfulness in the past which stimulates our thirst for Him in the present.* Remembrance is a dominant theme in the Old Testament and plays a huge role in faith.¹¹ “Remember His wonderful deeds He has done” (1 Chronicles 16:12). “Remember His covenant,” remember His promise (1 Chronicles 16:15). “Remember His lovingkindness” (Psalm 98:3).

God is faithful. God is good. God is personal. And because He has been faithful and good and personal in the past, we can count on Him to be faithful and good and personal today. All He asks is that we seek Him. And He promises, “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). And why seek Him, because only God can satisfy the soul!

I want to share what thirst looks like for me. John 15 is what I pray most. It is a bittersweet chapter for me. It promises so much, and yet, I’ve experienced only a fraction of all Jesus promises. So many days and so many nights when I go to bed, this is what I pray. In John 15, Jesus talked about abiding in Him. He invites us to abide in Him, to experience and enjoy a personal, intimate, day-by-day, moment-by-moment relationship with Him. Following His promises in John 15, I pray for ...

- **Answered prayer** – Because I want to know that God hears me and that He will respond to me. Jesus promised, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7, NAS). David also said, “I love the Lord, because He hears” (Psalm 116:1). Answered prayer proves that God is listening to me and that He will meet my needs. Nothing boosts my faith more than when God answers a specific prayer.
- **Fruitfulness** – I want to see God work in my life and to make my life count. Again, Jesus promised, “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8, NAS). I want to know that God is with me in my work. I also lean on Psalm 90, the prayer of Moses. “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and confirm the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands!” (Psalm 90:14, 17, ESV).¹² Fruitfulness proves that I am in His will and that His hand is on my life. I want that so much.
- **Love** – I pray all the time for God to hug me. I know God loves me, because the Bible tells me so. But there are so many times when I need more than words, and I cry out to Him, “Oh Lord, please let me feel You hug me.” I need Him to be that real to me. And Jesus promised in John 15, “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love” (John 15:9, NAS). I need to know that God loves me. Yes, the Bible tells me so. Yes, the cross tells me so. But I need a hug. I need to feel His love. Love proves that I am precious to Him, that I matter to Him, and that He will not take His eye off of me.
- **Joy** – Sure, there are a lot of things I want and pray for, but one thing trumps all the rest. Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11, ESV). I want to be happy. I want to be filled with a joy that can only come from Him. Joy proves that following Him is worth it. Joy proves that only God can satisfy my soul.

Praying through scripture stimulates my thirst for God, and it can do the same for you. I pray John 15 all the time. Because answered prayer proves that God is listening to me. Fruitfulness proves that I am in His will and that His hand is on my life. Love proves that I am precious to Him and that I matter to Him. And joy proves that following Him is worth it and that only He can satisfy my soul. John 15 helps me seek God, thirst for God, and trust God.

CONCLUSION

So, how thirsty are you for God? He invites us to experience and to enjoy a personal, intimate, day-by-day, moment-by-moment relationship with Him. Nothing will ever be more satisfying in your life than that. The author of Psalm 42 was convinced of that. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:1-2, NIV).

How thirsty are you for God?

NOTES

¹ Chet Raymo, “The Genetics of Belief,” *Notre Dame Magazine*, Spring 2005.

² Jeffrey Kluger, Jeff Chu, Maggie Sieger, Daniel Williams, “Is God in Our Genes?” *Time*, October 25, 2004.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Interview of Dean Hamer, by Laura Sheahen, “The Brain Chemistry of the Buddha,” www.beliefnet.com.

⁵ The Hebrew word is *āraq*; see TWOT 1691.

⁶ What Tozer called the “manifest presence of God.” A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), page 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, page 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, page 13.

¹⁰ The Hebrew word is *shāhah*; see TWOT 2361.

¹¹ “Remember what the Lord God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:18). “Remember all the way the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness” (Deuteronomy 8:2). “Seek His face continually. Remember His wonderful deeds” (1 Chronicles 16:12).

¹² The ESV reads “establish” and the NAS reads “confirm.”