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Longing for God

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Longing for God

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July 28,
2017

Ashley Bloemhof

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 119:129-136](#)

[1 Kings 1:38-48](#)

[Acts 7:44-53](#)

To thirst for God, to seek after His teachings and long for His presence, is to adopt the posture of the psalmist in Psalm 119. This chapter is made up of 22 stanzas (reflecting the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet), and each stanza includes eight verses that collectively speak of God's blameless laws, His mercy and grace, and the disobedient hearts of nonbelievers and persecutors. Focusing specifically on verses 129 to 136, readers of this psalm gain an understanding of the work's format as a whole and grasp the passionate longing with which the psalmist pursues the LORD's laws and His salvation.

The psalmist begins with a statement so bold that to claim it as one's own requires a serious diagnosis of one's heart: "Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them" (Psalm 119:29). To call God's testimonies "wonderful" is to regard both His pleasing and unpleasing decrees as equally good and true. This declaration blatantly clashes with the lifestyle of one who insists on being in control of life. Such an individual attempts to compete with the Savior for control of his or her life, and therefore such an individual cannot wholeheartedly uphold the above pronouncement. One must realize that she is not in control, that her own wills, or testimonies, are not wonderful, before she may even begin to consider following the Lord's will and doing so in the face of her own humility. Once that realization takes place, the prophet Isaiah tells the Israelites, and ourselves, that when we walk "in the way of [His] laws... [His] name and renown are the desire of our hearts" (26:8, NIV).

The next verse elaborates on the idea that God reveals Himself to the meek at heart. God is not looking to impart His word on those who try to impress Him with knowledge and esteem, which are the favorable markings of one whom the world loves. Instead, the LORD searches for the souls that bow humbly before Him, fully recognizing their limitations and seeking fulfillment in Him. William Cowper, the 18th-century poet and hymnist who wrote "Oh for a Closer Walk with God," among other works, describes the "simple" who receive understanding as those who "deny themselves... and like humble disciples submit themselves, not to ask, but to hear; not to reason, but to believe." Cowper's words grant modern Christians a glimpse of what it means to be a Christ follower, one whose faith defies reason and whose desire to listen overwhelms the desire to demand answers.

The humble desires of the simple display themselves in verse 131 as the psalmist professes to "long for [God's] commandments" so profoundly that "I open my mouth and pant." "Pant" may strike one as a rather mammal-like term. After all, dogs pant in need of water on a hot day, and horses pant in need of rest after a strenuous ride. In both cases, these animal are in need and their bodies are desperate for relief—and they know it. Turning to the condition of the soul, then, how thirsty is the body of Christ for the living God? Do Christians today willingly humble themselves before the LORD in recognition of their total depravity and His absolute love? "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2, ESV). How desperately does your soul long to be in His Presence?

Acknowledging his depravity in the face of God's laws, the psalmist continues the 17th stanza by asking for God's grace in directing His steps and protecting him from the evil one's attacks. Then, in verse 135, the psalmist's words—"Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes"—mirror those that the Lord spoke to Moses at the end of Numbers 6. God said to Moses, "²³Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the

people of Israel: you shall say to them,

²⁴The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

It is in light of the LORD’s shining face that the psalmist, in verse 136, expresses utmost despair in the face of people’s disobedience towards God: “streams of tears” fall from his face “because people do not keep Your law.” Once again, the psalmist’s love for holy truth and his hatred for sin are so strong that he is overwhelmed with emotion to the point of tears. It’s a compelling response, to be sure, as readers may ask themselves when they last burst into tears at the sight of sin. Now, sin occurs all around us on a daily basis, and to begin to bawl at each sighting would likely turn one into a basket-case. And yet, should not the presence of sin in this world cause us to lament, especially since it dishonors the God we serve? William Greenhill, minister and member of the Westminster Assembly, said the following in relation to this verse: “The eye is for two things, sight and tears: if we see God dishonoured, presently our eyes should be filled with tears.” Do we really mean what we say when we sing, “Break our heart for what breaks yours”?

If you’re looking for a new addition to your devotional schedule, I encourage you to take 22 days and read one stanza of Psalm 119 each day. Reflect on how the eight verses work together, embrace the truth they speak into your life, and look forward to a future when man’s oppression and the devil’s deception may no longer touch you.