

Recently, my bother-in-law just released a book titled, “Confession of a Christian Alcoholic” where he shares about his journey and relationship with alcohol. It was a slow fade to rock bottom and how it is only through Jesus he found way out of that hole and back to a healthier life. This sermon’s not about alcohol - the reason I’m bringing it up is because there is a concept in his book that I believe is helpful to our topic today. He cites that in medical community there’s been a movement away from the term Alcoholism to Alcohol Use Disorder. Alcoholism seems to imply a very binary I am an alcoholic or I’m not, but the truth of the matter is it’s not that simple and clean cut. Alcohol Use Disorder better represent a spectrum of use disorder - from mild, to moderate, to severe. Here’s the concept that I love, think is helpful and want to make a spiritual application out of it: “Alcoholism, (now officially called, Alcohol Use Disorder) isn’t just about how much you drink, it’s more about **the place alcohol occupies in your life.**” It’s not just about the amount, it’s about **the draw, the pull** and how you orient your life around it. “Over the years, I developed a lot of excuses to drink: I’m happy-drink. I’m sad-drink. I’m excited-drink. I’m mad-drink. I’m cooking-drink. I’m doing yardwork-drink. I’m relaxing-drink. I’m anxious-drink. I’m watching TV-drink. I’m reading-drink. I’m having a bad day-drink. Having a great day-drink. I’m on vacation-drink. I’m ashamed-drink a lot. Nearly every opportunity & circumstance fit into some bucket of, “Well, this call calls for a drink.” This paints a picture of what is meant by the place it holds in your life, place it **occupies** in your mind - you **orient** your life around it, **think** about it, make **decisions** based on it.

This draw/pull isn’t isolated to alcohol - it’s just a **part of being human** – there’s a plethora of other things – whether looks, health, wealth, recognition, pleasure, relaxation, politics, information, kids, food, etc...

So the question I want us to all reflect on is this: What do you **long for**, what do you **desire**, what are you **gravitating to**, what are you **orienting your life around**, what are you making **decisions** based off of, what **occupies your mind**, what would you **go out of your way for**? What’s it doing to you, your soul, your relationships?

My hope is, and I think we would all say, **we want that to be JESUS** – and sometimes He is. But the **likelihood** is that there may be some other things, other people, that have a more powerful pull on our lives, that hold too prominent of a place in our mind, that we shape our lives and decisions around.

I feel like there is probably room for all of us to grow, to take a next step, to enter a deeper level of **seeking** the Lord, to be **drawn** toward Him, to be **thinking** more about Him, to **orient** our lives more around him.

To help us do that, I want to run to the **PSLAMs** for **inspiration** and **encouragement** today.

Psalm 84 isn't primarily commanding desire — it's expressing it. It's not, You should love God more but look how beautiful life becomes when God Himself is your greatest desire. It's a song of delight, not duty. The invitation isn't try harder to desire God but see how good He is — and let that awaken your desire.

Why is that important? St. Clare of Assisi "We become what we love..."

1 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! 2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

It is **not just God's house**, but the place of the **presence of God** that prompts the song.

For these pilgrims the **tabernacle/temple was where heaven & earth met** (presence of God)

But for us New Testament believers - it's a little different...

Jesus "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." (Col 1:19)

Believers, "Don't you know that you are the temple of the living God." (I Cor 3:16)

Since God is Omnipresent, everywhere and has taken up residence in believer....

So why do I need to long for, desire, seek, faint for the presence of the Lord?

You can be present **beside** someone, without being present **with** someone.

Jamie sitting next to me on the couch trying to talk me while sports are on TV

Parent on smart phone and kid on their iPad sitting at the same table.

Presence isn't just about **proximity** it's about **intentionality** – focus of mind.

Faints - pass out unconscious, all consuming, exhausted with delay, "I'll die if I don't get what I want" (D coming out of surgery and needing water). Even a physical effect.

"It is obvious that many don't have anything near the intensity of desire this psalmist expresses and what they lack in desire they make up for in excuses."

THE REASON for such intense longing to be in the presence of the Lord was to **WORSHIP** (heart and flesh (whole self) sing for joy - praise). We will never feel like worshipping God until we understand something of his greatness, and we cannot help but worship once we do. In other words, there is a direct correlation between our view of God and our desire for worship. The greater God is in our eyes, the greater will be our desire to worship him.

3 Even the **sparrow** finds a home, and the **swallow** a **nest** for herself, where she may lay her **young**, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!

Nest/Young – "We rejoice not only in our personal opportunities to worship, but in the great blessing of bringing our children with us. The church of God is a house for us and a nest for our little ones."

Sparrow represents **worthlessness** (Mt 10:29–31 two sparrows sold for a penny)

Swallow a common symbol for **restlessness**. If this is what is in view then what a beautiful, clear message - If you feel worthless, if you feel restless - move toward Jesus, orient your life around Jesus, long for the presence of the Lord and to worship Jesus / desire him.

“Blessed are those who dwell in your house” This is the **first of three beatitudes**

Blessed / happy / deep seeded joy / good life / the way of thriving

You want this blessedness? Dwell/Abide in the presence of God and sing praises to Him

Summary of 1-4 The health of our souls can be measured by our hunger for God

5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. 6 As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. 7 They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.

Section changes the subject from the **house of the Lord** to the **travelers themselves**.

Believed to have been sung by those traveling to Jerusalem to participate in a great festival.

Psalm 84 is about movement - from outside to inside; from countryside to the temple; from ordinary to extraordinary; from daily concerns to sacred space. It **invites us to consider, are we moving towards God**. Are your thoughts drawn more toward God. **Invites us to reflect on our own spiritual journey and longing for God**.

2nd Beatitude: Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion Blessing/happy/peace/thriving-is when your strength is in God-not something else.

Is 40:28-31 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

“Whose heart (desire language) are the highways of Zion”

These are **paths that lead to God** / the **pursuit of God** / the **way of the Lord** – His good, right, best and most beautiful **plan for human thriving**, His rule, His reign, His Kingdom.

“Nothing is more injurious to a man than to trust in his own understanding, but those are happy whose highest ambition it is to have God as the guide of their life, and who therefore desire to draw near to him.”

Where do you find strength? And what paths are you desiring to take – where do they lead?

Christian life is a JOURNEY is it not? And on this journey, there will be **trouble, heartache, dry spells, difficulty, disappointment**. This is “The Valley of Baca” - waterless and barren valley through which pilgrims passed on their way to Jerusalem.

Look at the **transforming power** of praise...because I long for the lord, desire the Lord and his ways, his paths, because my mind and heart is on the Lord - they make (this dry, difficult valley) a place of springs

David Crowder’s song “Somebody Prayed” there are these beautiful lines:

I've seen miracles come from feeble words. I've seen hospital rooms turned into cathedrals
The power of praise & pursuit is **transformative**, not just in you but **what you go through**.
Some of you are going through the Valley of Baca / valley or weeping / a dry & dessert place
of **testing & affliction & difficulty**. When you’re in the valley of **sickness & disease**, the
valley of **unemployment**, the valley **family stress & strife**. Your desire, pursuit & praise of
the Lord is the well from which you draw strength and **turn deserts into an oasis**.

Here lies a **reason, some do not desire**, pursue, follow, orient our lives around moving
toward the Jesus is that **it’s’ easier to stay where you are than journey toward Jesus**. The
Valley (representing all kinds of **difficulty** on our journeys) **often discourages travelers**:
“There are those who will not submit to any inconvenience, who indulge themselves in their
own ease and pleasures, and allow nothing to interfere with these. They will readily profess
themselves to be the servants of God, provided they are not required to make any exertion
or sacrifice. But those who have true religion, and who sincerely serve God, direct their
steps toward God, not only when the way is easy and cheerful, but also when they must
walk through rugged and barren deserts.”

“Early rain” is **from God** - His provision for us and **GRACE** towards us as we travel this road.

“They go from strength to strength” - you would expect to read they grew weary (from
strength to weakness) ‘Not so,’ In fact, just the opposite was the case. The closer the
pilgrims got to the city of Jerusalem, the stronger they became. **Instead of fainting on their
toilsome journey the pilgrims gain fresh strength as they advance**.

8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! 9 Behold our shield, O
God; look on the face of your anointed!

The pilgrim enters the courts and calls upon God (v. 8) and offers prayer for the king.
Israel’s **king** is known as a “**shield**” and also as the **anointed one** or “**Messiah**”
All pointing toward Jesus the Messiah, the King of Kings

10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a
doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the Lord

God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. 12 O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you

Derived and anchored our theme verse for Opening Doors - **prayer** that this would be the heart of **every person in our church** - a strong hunger for the Lord, a desire to be in his presences, a life overflowing with praise, the ability not only to endure but to transform dry, dark, difficult situation and the willingness to joyfully serve our Lord however he calls us to.

The **slightest contact with God** through real, heartfelt worship is **more satisfying** than the deepest involvement in sin (just a little drop of Jesus is better than deluge of sin delight)

“The lowest station in connection with the Lord’s house is better than the highest position among the godless. Only to wait at his threshold and peep within, so as to see Jesus, is bliss. To bear burdens and open doors for the Lord is more honor than to reign among the wicked. Every person has their choice, and this is ours. God’s worst is better than the devil’s best.”

The last two verses give praise to God:

“a sun and shield,” = a source of light (illuminate pathway / joy / growth) and protection

“The pilgrim nation found both sun and shield in that fiery cloudy pillar which was the symbol of Jehovah’s presence, and the Christian still finds both light and shelter in the Lord his God. A sun for happy days and a shield for dangerous ones. A sun above, a shield around. A light to show the way and a shield to ward off its perils.”

“the Lord bestows favor and honor” – He has both grace and glory in infinite abundance

“no good thing does he withhold”

Something that we think or want or see as good may be withheld, but no real good, not one.

Third Beatitude:

It’s the key of the Psalm - this blessedness is only for believers - the one who trusts in you!!!

The pursuit, the longing, the desire, the movement toward **anything else will never secure the blessedness**, joy, satisfaction or a thriving life more than a life focused on, desiring, moving toward, oriented around, thinking about and praising Jesus Christ. It is only when He holds the prominent space in our life that we will reap the effects we see in this Psalm.

(Unbeliever) Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ alone as your savior?

Believer - When you don’t desire, seek, long and live for God - life not centered, oriented around him - you won’t lose your salvation, but you will lose your satisfaction.

George Orwell - “There was a wasp was sucking jelly on my plate, and I cut him in half. He paid no attention, merely went on with his meal. Only when he tried to fly away did he grasp the dreadful thing that had happened to him. It is the same with modern man. The thing that has been cut away is his soul, and there was a period—twenty years perhaps—during which he did not notice.”

Have you been cut off from the spiritual side of yourself?

Feel like something is missing. Just not right. Piece of me left behind as I’ve pursued other things. Really trying to find joy, happiness in whatever but just not fulfilling.

The invitation today isn’t ‘try harder to desire God,’ but see again how good He is — and let that awaken your desire.

What can you do to see how good He is, to awaken, kindle, reorient your desire for God:

Trust Immediately - salvation of your soul

Pursue Daily - Cultivate rhythms that re-center your heart on God’s presence

Eric Gieger - Lifeway - the keystone habit that effects all other habits / greatest projection of spiritual health is...reading the Bible

Praise Faithfully - praise is a weapon that overcomes the enemy

Serve Gladly - be a door opener to usher others into the presence of the Lord

Give Generously - trusting you, bringing an offering of worship to you, showing the desire for you and your kingdom – Fill Out & Turn in a Commitment Card

Transform Valleys - When trials come, instead of asking “Why me?” ask “Praise, seek the Lord and ask him to help you, transform this valley into a spring of living water”

Sermon Discussion Questions for Psalm 84
“Orienting your life around Jesus” Sermon by Destin Garner
www.rpc.fm/sermon-library

Have a few different people read the passage below aloud, prior to beginning discussion.

Scripture Passage: Psalm 84: 1-12

1. List all the names for God and describe the character traits about God you can find in Psalm 84. Explain which one means most to you and why?
2. Psalm 84 opens with deep longing for God’s presence. When you honestly look at your life, what are you orienting yourself around right now— your priorities, your schedule, and your thoughts? How is that shaping the health of your soul and relationships?
3. What are you longing for most in this season? How do those longings draw you toward or away from being able to honestly say, “My soul longs... for the courts of the Lord.” (v.2)?
4. How can we tell if/when something good has taken a central place that belongs only to Jesus Christ?
5. Where do you feel the need for rest and belonging right now? How might worship reorient that area of your life? (verses 3-4)
6. When have you seen God turn a dry “valley” into a place of growth? What current challenge might God want to turn into a spring? (Verses 5-7)
7. What does choosing God’s presence over other options look like in your daily life? Where do you feel that tension most? (verse 10)
8. How has the Lord given you grace and glory (or favor and honor) as mentioned in verse 11?
9. Reviewing verses 4-12 and the three blessings...which is hardest for you right now—dwelling in God’s presence, depending on His strength, or trusting Him? Why?
10. How can our small group encourage you and pray for you this month?

Application & Next Steps

Considering the practical rhythms Destin mentioned (trust immediately, pursue daily, praise faithfully, serve gladly, give generously, transform valleys), which one do you sense God inviting you to act on this week? What does 1 specific next step look like for you?

What does the "Valley of Baca" metaphor (a place of tears) represent in your life, and how can walking through seasons of hardship become a source of spiritual growth for you?

Encourage a child/ teen or college student or single you know to sign up and serve with you at Feed the Hunger this week www.rpc.fm/fth

Read Psalm 84 every day this week and memorize Psalm 84 this month!