

Summer in the Psalms

Psalm 23

The Realities of Life

Most days, it seems like we live in two different worlds: (1) Monday through Saturday—our life filled with mundane routines, moments of pleasure, mindless lounging, and meaningless interactions and (2) Sunday—worshipping God with his people—singing, praying and receiving and responding to God’s word.

In the day in, day out frenzy of life—work, meals, chores, commute, Netflix, video games, workouts, and other activities—the reality of God’s assuring presence, his hope-filled promises, and his life-giving power is easily overshadowed. We can go an entire day, perhaps a few days, or even a week, and not even think about God. In fact, when we sit still and silent long enough, we may realize that we live lonely, uncertain, and powerless lives. God seems to be hidden in the countless pages of the Bible.

If we slow down to think about God, most of us will confess that we struggle with a “head—heart” disconnect. How many times have you heard yourself, or someone else, say, “I believe God loves me in my head but I don’t experience his love in my heart.” More times than not, our experience of God doesn’t match with what we know about God. The reality of this disconnect, and mismatch, associated with our relationship with God can leave us fearful that we are not good enough as a Christian, apathetic after repeated attempts to feel something from God end in disappointment, or hardened after giving up on God, who we think has given up on us.

You Are Created to Know and Experience God

Given the realities just discussed, the Christian life seems confusing, so hard to figure out. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died for our sins so that we would be reconciled with God. However, the best news of the gospel is that God saved us so that we could know him, to enjoy life with him, and to experience his love. God has invited us on a journey where he is making us more and more beautiful in Christ with each glance of his glory, with each taste of his goodness, with each response of faith, with every moment of trust and obedience.

Believe it or not, God is pursuing you, specifically your heart. He wants to win your affections. He created you to adore him and to be overwhelmed with his love. He delights when you seek him for refuge when you are afraid. In your stillness, he wants you to know he is God.

What reality is pressing down on you? Honestly describe how are you experiencing your relationship with God.

Experiencing God through His Word

God’s time-tested way of deepening your relational experience with him is through receiving, praying and living out his word by the power of his Spirit. God’s word gives us new life and is implanted in our hearts (Jas. 1:18, 21). God invites you to hunger and thirst for his righteousness (Jesus Christ) AND promises to satisfy you (Matt. 5:6). Only God’s Spirit can calm your heart, lift your eyes to Christ and restore our soul.

Every Christian needs to learn how to draw near to God and experience his love through his living word (Heb. 4:12). You will have an opportunity to experience God as you walk through Psalm 23 in various ways.

Receiving God's Word—Psalm 23

- ¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
³ He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

What did you experience in your heart and mind as you received God's word?

Praying God's Word—Psalm 23

Prayer flows out of your relationship with God. Prayer not only involves crying out to God from your heart, but more importantly, involves answering God,¹ as you hear his heart through his word. Praying God's word guides what you pray, shapes how you pray and gives voice to your prayers. You can be confident when you pray God's word since his word reveals his purposes and desires.

- Example of praying through Psalm 23.
- **Take a moment** to pray through Psalm 23. You may pray about what you noted above or the Spirit may move you to pray in a totally different way as you work your way through the psalm.
- As you pray you may find yourself *adoring* God, *confessing* to God, *thanking* God and *praying for* yourself and for others.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*, p. 12.

How did God shepherd you as you prayed through Psalm 23?

How did praying through Ps. 23 differ from your typical prayers?

Jesus Christ and his Spirit are praying for you, as God's people, without interruption. **Read Rom. 8:26-27; 8:34** (cf. Heb. 7:25; Isa. 53:12; Jn. 17). The Father knows your heart and knows your needs. Given that God's word reveals God's will, it makes sense that Jesus and his Spirit pray God's word for you, to include Psalm 23.

How may the Son and Spirit be praying the Father's will for you as expressed in Psalm 23?

(Write out the Son's and Spirit's prayer on your behalf to the Father. Include your name in the prayer.)

Living Out God's Word—Psalm 23

Receiving and praying God's word draws you into God's presence and shapes your understanding and inclinations, enabling you to relate and respond to God rightly. In other words, receiving and praying God's word are always connected with living God's word. God invites you to be *hearers and doers* of his word in a reciprocal and parallel manner. You can't fully understand God's word without living it out and you can't fully live out God's word without receiving and praying his word.

God gave us at least three different word pictures to help us to understand the importance of living out God's word. First, Jesus uses the parable of *two foundations*, where he compares the wise and foolish builder (Matt. 7:24-27). The main difference being the wise builder hears and does the word, which enable him to withstand the storms of life. Jesus adds that those who hear the word and obey it are blessed (Luke 11:28). Second, Jesus uses the image of *the vine and the branch*. Not only can we not doing anything apart from Christ, but we abide in his love when we obey his commands, which also results in experiencing his joy (Jn. 15:5; 9-11). Third, we are given the picture of a *mirror*. Those who merely hear the word is like one who looks in the mirror then forgets what he looks like in their disobedience—forgetting who they are in Christ, how God calls them to live, and who God is and what he has done. But the one who looks at God's word and does it, which helps in not forgetting what they heard, is blessed and finds freedom as they live *with* God and live *for* God (Jas. 1:21-25).

Given what you noted about what reality is pressing down on you, or how you are struggling in your relationship with God, consider how God is calling you to *trust* and *obey* him so that you can live his word, which enables you to experience his blessing and find freedom found in Christ.

How Can I Live Out Psalm 23?

List 1 or 2 practical ways God is calling you to live out the truths found in Psalm 23. Here are some examples:

- When I am discontent, I will look to Jesus, my Good Shepherd, and ask him to satisfy me with his presence, love, and comfort (23:1, 4, 6).
- I will spend more time laying down in the green pastures through God's word, feeding on his truths instead of listening to the lies in my head and the lies of the world around me (23:2-3).
- I will seek to follow Jesus, my Shepherd, by hearing and doing his word, since he knows what's best for me (23:3).
- When I am fearful and anxious, I will remember that God is with me and his love and mercy pursues me all the days of my life (23:4-6).