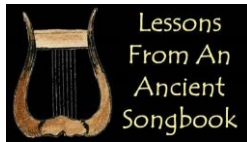


Desire & Despair

May 6, 2018

OPEN

If you grew up in church, what song stands out as particularly meaningful for you? Why? In your life now, what is a worship song that is very meaningful for you today?



For several weeks we are going to examine selected Psalms written by the sons of Korah, who were temple musicians. These psalms represent deep longing after God. But these writers also acknowledged times of despair.

DIG

Read Psalm 42. Does it read like a praise song? Do you get a sense of its structure? Did you notice the refrain in verse 5 and 11? This breaks the psalm into two parts.

1. Part One - the problem of vulnerability - vv. 1-5

When was the last time you were really physically thirsty? How would you describe your thirst or longing for God?

What do these other passages suggest about longing for God?

Psalm 63:1-5

Psalm 84:1-4

When you long for God, does it feel like you are making yourself vulnerable? Why or why not?

According to verse 3, why did the psalmist feel vulnerable when he longed after God?

What did the psalmist remember in verse 4?

When you have times of despair, what “better times” do you remember?

The first refrain in verse 5 reveals some serious spiritual self-reflection in the form of a question to one’s soul: why are you in despair?

What is the answer that is also found in this verse?

Jesus Himself experienced the tension between the *eternal* (desire for God) and the *temporal* (defaulting to despair).

What do the following verses tell us about what Jesus experienced and what He has provided for us?

John 12:27

John 16:33.

2. Part Two - the problem of visibility - vv. 6-11

The psalmist feels a distance from God, overwhelmed as if the Jordan River has flowed over him.

When do you feel that you are distant or invisible to God? Why?

What poetic expression is used in verse 8 to highlight God’s never ending presence with us?

In the verses 9-10 the psalmist confessed to a sense of abandonment. What makes this sense of abandonment worse?

The second refrain in verse 11 echoes the first. It is identical in the NIV but slightly different in the original language – just a little more *personal*...

“The help of His presence” (v. 5)

“The help of my countenance and my God” (v. 11)

REFLECT

Do you ever feel that if God is ever present and all powerful it would be logical for us to avoid despair?

Can God be closer than our thoughts? Consider Amy Carmichael’s words:

Thou who upon the heavens dost ride

What miracle of love

Brings Thee more swiftly to our side

Than even thought can move

As a moth struggles to be transformed, followers of God change through the desire-despair tension. We are invited to work out our salvation, secure in the fact that God gives both desire and power. Read Philipians 2:12-13.

Check out the **SHIYR POETS** led by Brian Doerksen. As their website says, they are seeking to make “*the world’s most loved and ancient songbook new again...The Psalms express the human longing for God with poetic artistry and emotional force. They release the voice of praise and resonate with the universal cry of pain.*”