

Psalm 42:1-2**Deepening our intimacy with God**12th Oct 2017

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Psalm 42:1-2 (NLV) New Life Version

42 As the deer desires rivers of water, so my soul desires You, O God. ² My soul is thirsty for God, for the living God. When will I come and meet with God?

Have you ever got to a place where your body is just craving water and you don't care where you get fluid from, as long as you get some?

What happens when you finally get to drink some and you feel it going down the back of your throat?

Isn't that a magical feeling!!! Having your thirst finally quenched.

The Psalmist here is using the analogy of an animal desiring water (and the word "DESIRE" means: *longs eagerly for*) - so the Psalmist longed to be refreshed spiritually in a similar way.

One of the questions that was given by our youth when Baz asked about what topics they wanted taught on a Sunday evening, one answer came back from a number of the youth...which was:

"What does a relationship with God look and feel like?"

In my view...what the Psalmist was trying to capture was the very essence of that question...you are only satisfied spiritually, when you start drinking in more of God, there is a spiritual thirst in every one of us - and you desire more of God the more you go without Him...it's just that you don't know that's the thirst inside of you, so you try to satisfy that thirst with other things.

Have there been times in your life when you think..."I just want a tangible sense of God's presence" a time where you find yourself starting to thirst, but you haven't had your thirst quenched in the way you know is possible?

Well if that's you, listen up because tonight is about some suggestions that might just help you find what you so seek.

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When I was at my last church, they started talking about me taking a bit of time off like Graham's just had. The suggestion got floated that I could enrol in a course of study, read and take in...between you and me...**that really didn't interest me.**

I know they had the best of intentions, but for me, that wouldn't connect me with God that would burn me out.

Now I'm a Pastor and you just heard me say, study and reading burns me out.

It's not really what you expect the Pastor to say is it?...but it's the truth.

This sort of thing fires some people up, and their soul starts to find it quenches the thirst they have been experiencing. I honestly think that's fantastic, but it doesn't quench the thirst inside of me the same way.

Please hear me when I say...I am NOT saying **study and reading are not important**, because they are, especially when it comes to studying God's Word, but when the question is asked ***"What does a relationship with God look and feel like?"*** I'm not about to say – *"well if you studied more, prayed harder and read more books you might know"*

Tonight, I want to give you some other alternatives, so you can allow your times of intimacy to grow and to deepen, and so you get a very real sense of connection in your relationship with the Lord.

I want to tell you about Pathways. Pathways that can lead us right to God, pathways that, if you are open to it, can connect us in beautiful ways with Him that quenches the spiritual thirst we have.

They aren't my suggestions/thoughts they come from John Otberg and Bill Hybels.

After speaking to thousands of believers John Otberg came up with seven different connections...it's not an exhaustive list but it might just spur you to a place of recognition that - **one of these pathways is what connects you to God too.**

Here they are:

- 1) The Relational pathway
- 2) The Intellectual pathway
- 3) The Service Pathway
- 4) The Worship Pathway
- 5) The Activist Pathway
- 6) The Contemplative Pathway
- 7) The Creation Pathway

Tonight, I want us to take a brief look at each one.

1 – Relational Pathway

This is probably your pathway if

- Your spiritual growth comes most naturally when you are involved in significant relationships.
- Small groups and other community life experiences are key
- Usually relational pathway folk are small group junkies, forever forming small groups, at home, in the shop, in lifts – they just can't help it!
- Your life is an open book, and you are surprised that it is difficult for others to be open
- Being alone can drive you crazy
- You think solitude wouldn't be so bad if only I could bring a few friends with me!
- People energise you – the more people the better
- God will often speak to you through people

Biblical example - Peter

He was part of the inner three, after the crucifixion he put together a fishing party. His life defining moments all took place in a relational context; confession of Jesus as Christ and his denial and restoration

To Strengthen

- You need a relationally rich life
- Use your spiritual gift to serve others, and pray with others in community
- You'll probably learn best in a class or a small group (not distant learning/private study)

- You'll tend to have lots of relationships, use your networks of contacts to further God's kingdom

Cautions

- Guard against superficiality. Make sure you have a few deep relationships, people who get past the friend of all and can love you, challenge you, encourage you and give you wise counsel
- Don't just always fit in

Ways to stretch

- Develop a capacity for silence, so you can learn to speak and listen to God when you are alone
- Keep some of your experiences with God a secret so you don't get addicted to hearing what other people think
- Study scripture by yourself so you are grounded in God's word rather than other people's opinion
- Be intentional about inviting one or two close friends to speak truth to you so that your relationship is more than a social

2 - Intellectual Pathway

This is probably your pathway if

- You draw close to God as you learn more about him
- The study of Scripture and theology comes very naturally
- You love books, learning, expanding your knowledge and understanding
- You tend to have little patience for emotional approaches to faith
- During worship you feel like you are marking time waiting for the word
- In a small group you feel that relational folk are just swapping their ignorance
- You like to think
- When faced with problems or spiritual challenges you go into problem solving mode

A Biblical example - The Apostle Paul

Even before his conversion we read that he was well studied (a student of Gamaliel, Jewish scholar). After his conversion he liked to debate in the synagogues

To Strengthen

- You need to keep building on your studying (Stop studying – and your faith will stagnate)
- Expose yourself to books & teaching that stretches you
- Find some like-minded people to stretch you

Cautions

- Make sure you don't become all head and no heart
- You love to be right and that can be dangerous
- **Don't confuse being smart with being spiritually mature**

Dallas Willard wrote

One of the hardest things in the world is to be right and not to hurt anyone with it

Ways to stretch

- Devote yourself to corporate worship and private adoration and prayer (This may be tough, but learning needs to lead to worship)

1 Cor 8:1 *"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up"*

- Another way to stretch is to assess how loving you are when you share your knowledge with others

3 - Service pathway

This is probably your pathway if

- You find God most tangible when you are helping others
- You are often uncomfortable when you are not doing anything, even if it's only setting up the chairs, that's enough to help you feel close to God
- You constantly look for acts of service you can engage in and often don't even need to be asked

Biblical example - Dorcas

In the book of Acts - a lady well known for her life of good deeds

To Strengthen

- Get plugged into a community so you have opportunities for meaningful service to offer God
- If you are just attending church and not serving God, your connectedness to God will begin to disconnect
- Look for glimpses of God in the people you serve and in the execution of your task
- Cultivate an awareness of those moments when you sense God with you as you serve
- Prepare to serve first by praying so your service is genuine

Cautions

- Be careful not to resent others who do not serve as much as you do
- Remember that God loves you not because you are so faithful in serving him, but because you are his child, don't confuse serving with earning

Ways to stretch

- Balance your service with small group and community life
- Learn how to receive love even when you are not being productive
- Practise expressing love through words as well as actions (That way your pathway will help you feel liberated by service rather than confined by it)

4 – Worship pathway

This is probably your pathway if

- You love Ps 122:1 *"I rejoiced with those who said to me "Let us go to the house of the Lord"*
- You have a deep love of corporate praise and a natural inclination towards celebration

- In difficult periods of life, worship is one of the most healing activities you engage in
- When you worship at church you hope it will go on for hours
- While the intellectuals are looking at their watches you are saying again, again
- Sometimes people on this pathway are not demonstrative or expressive, yet in worship your heart opens up and you come alive and enthusiastically participate

Biblical example - King David

To Strengthen

- Experience great worship on a regular basis
- When the body of Christ gathers be there
- Use Christian worship music
- Learn about other worship traditions and incorporate them into your worship

Cautions

- Be careful not to judge others who are not as expressive in worship
- Guard against experience based Christianity that has you looking for the next high

Meister Eckhart says

“The danger in finding a way to God is that people grow to love the way more than they love God”

Ways to stretch

- Engage in the discipline of study. Keep filling your mind to keep your heart and emotions rooted
- Serve God in concrete ways as an expression of your worship
- Remain committed to you even when the worship isn't what you would like it to be

5 - Activist pathway - taking direct action to achieve a social goal

This is probably your pathway if

- You have a single-minded zeal and a very strong sense of vision
- You have a passion to build the church and to work for justice
- Challenges don't discourage you, in fact they energise you – you thrive on opposition
- You do everything you can to bring out the potential God has placed in other people
- You love a fast paced, problem filled, complex, strenuous way of life

Biblical example - Nehemiah

Faced with the impossible job of restoring Jerusalem, he prayed and then got stuck in

To Strengthen

- Create a sense of challenge in your life by immersing yourself in tasks that demand the best you have to offer. If you are not moving you get frustrated and stagnate
- Find a team to invest in and work with them to achieve big goals

Cautions

- Be aware that you may run over people, or use them to achieve the goal
- Guard against going too long without pausing to reflect, check your motives, spiritual condition and emotional state

Ways to stretch

- Create balance in your activism by spending time in solitude
- Cultivate a reflective discipline like journaling
- Develop close spiritual friendships with one or two others. Invite them to regularly ask you questions and speak to you about what God is doing in you – not just through you

6 – Contemplative Pathway

This is probably your pathway if

- You love uninterrupted time alone

- Reflections come naturally to you. The presence of God is most real when all distractions are gone
- You have a large capacity for prayer
- If you get busy or spend lots of time with people you get drained and yearn for solitude

Biblical example - Mary (Martha's sister) she sat Jesus' feet

To Strengthen

- You have permission to build your strength
- Don't criticise yourself for what you are not
- You need regular, protected, intense times of solitude and stillness
- Making time and space to listen to God is vital
- Faithfully follow your intuition and the Holy Spirit's leading
- Act on what you hear God saying during your silent times

Cautions

- You have a tendency of avoiding the demands of the real world because it doesn't live up to your ideals. Be careful not to retreat to your inner world when friends, family or society disappoints you
- Be careful not to consider your times of private prayer and solitude as less important than the more public acts of ministry performed by others
- Don't view others as less spiritual because they don't spend hours in solitude

Ways to stretch

- Choose a regular place of active service (remember to show your faith by what you do as James urges)
- Stay relationally connected, even when these relationships become difficult or challenging
- Connect with those who have an activist pathway. Pray for them and consider getting involved in some aspect of their ministry

7 – Creation Pathway

This is probably your pathway if

- You respond deeply to God through your experience of nature
- Being outdoors replenishes you, it moves your heart, opens your soul and strengthens your faith.
- You are highly aware of your physical senses, and often art, symbols or ritual will help you grow
- You tend to be creative

Biblical example – you get the big one – Jesus

Jesus actually could be used for all of the pathways, however the Bible seems to highlight a special connection with nature. Jesus often withdrew to an outdoor place, the mountains, the Sea of Galilee - to be with his Father. **I guess this shouldn't be a surprise as he made it!**

To Strengthen

- Get outside as much as possible.
- Find a location to getaway to.
- Make natural beauty part of your spiritual life
- When you pray it might be helpful to have some natural beauty around you, like scenery, flowers, or candles

Cautions

- You may be tempted to use beauty or nature to escape
- You will find that people are sometimes disappointing
- Guard against the temptation to avoid church because you think you can worship God in nature by yourself
- Yes you were made for God's beauty but you also need to see God's beauty in people and allow God to speak to you through them

Ways to stretch

- Stay involved in a worshipping community (You need people – after all God made them as well)
- From time to time be prepared to help out in less than beautiful settings, the ugliness of the fallen world is not pleasant, but God's love is for all, and you are part of His solution
- Take Scripture with you into nature, and meditate on God's word as you enjoy His creation.

Another possible pathway?

8 – Creative Pathway

You are the type of person who finds that you are most open and expressive when you are being creative. It is as though God is right next to you as you write, paint, mould, build, etc. Creating is a celebration of God's goodness. As you create, God's creativity inspires you, you feel an intimacy with God as you create that nothing else compares to. Your movements, your writing, acting, etc., communicate with God on a heart level deeper than just words, and God seems to respond on that level to you. This is the place that you meet with God

What next?

Bill Hybels recommended some practical steps for us to take.

1. Try to identify which pathway is more “*you shaped*”, the place that you most easily find yourself close to God. If one doesn't particularly strike you, that's okay, for you may be a mixture of a few, or maybe I haven't touched on your particular place/pathway. Look back on your Christian walk and try to spot when you felt closest to God.
2. **For a time**, concentrate on the pathway, or place where you usually feel close to God – totally go overboard with it!!!.

If your place is in worship, spend a lot of time playing worship songs, if it's in relationships, spend a lot of time praying and studying with others, if it is in nature, get out on some long walks. Basically, spend a big chunk of time with

God. This will help you to identify if this really is your pathway, if it's not, try another!

3. **Develop and cultivate** pathways that are not naturally yours. Learn that you can meet God in worship, in isolation, in relationship, etc., Basically increase your opportunity to meet with God so that when dry times hit, you know some “set moves” and have other places to meet with God besides your main pathway.
4. **Honour other people's** pathways. Realise that other people meet God more intimately in different places to yourself. Don't fall into the “*quiet time*” trap of only recognising one main place to meet with God.