

Longing for God

By Bobby Schuller

When I was in fifth grade, I wanted a Sony Walkman. And the opportunity presented itself to me. There was this guy that came to our school who was essentially employing children to make money for his chocolate company. He brought in chocolate and encouraged the students from our school to sell the chocolate in order to raise money and to get prizes. As I realized later, I was drumming up hundreds of dollars for this guy and for my school so I could get a ten-dollar Walkman. At any rate, it seemed totally worth it at the time. Maybe some of you feel that way in your jobs.

So, I had this box of mint chocolates. I was walking around our neighborhood and it was hot outside. We lived in Chatsworth, and super hot, and I'm walking around with my chocolates selling chocolate. I'm way far from home and I get super thirsty. And I just have nothing to drink, I'm so thirsty, I'm going door to door asking people to buy my chocolates to support my church. And I get so thirsty I get the dumb idea that maybe I should eat some of my chocolate. So, I dig in, start eating chocolate, and it doesn't dissolve. It just turns into brown gunk in my mouth and now I've just gone from being thirsty to really suffering. So I'm walking around with like chocolate in my mouth, somebody knocks

on the door I go 'hello, would you like to buy some chocolate?' There's sweat coming down my face.

And I'll never forget this old lady one time I knocked on the door, she must have seen it on my face because she didn't even say anything. She left the door open; she came back with a tall glass of ice water with a little bead of water coming down the side and a little frost around the edges. Drank the water and I'll never forget when you're that thirsty, nothing is as good as a tall drink of ice cold water. Can I get an amen, people?

There is something about being thirsty and just drinking ice water. Better than lemonade, it's better than Monster drink. And so today I want to begin with that story because I want you to think of a time in which you were just so thirsty. You felt so thirsty you would have done anything for a glass of water. That is the human condition. Our souls are thirsty. They're thirsty. They need to drink something. There's something in the heart of every human being that is thirsty, that wants to drink. You have a desire and you wonder how can this ever be satiated?

Today we're continuing a series on the Psalms and the Psalms today we're talking about the Psalms of longing. Psalms of longing are the Psalms in which David or one of the Psalmists says Lord I long for

you and desire you. This reverberating from the heart that I want God, I need God, and yet an almost desperate heart that can't seem to attain or acquire God in its wanting.

In Psalm chapter 63, which was read today, David says, "You God are my God. Diligently I seek you. I thirst for you. My whole body longs for you in a dry and parched land." You hear the thirst. David's complete desire is to want, to be with, and to experience God to the fullest.

David, at this time when he's writing the Psalm, was being chased by his own son. He was king. He was an older man now. He was well established. And the son, Absalom decided he was going to take his father's throne, created an uprising, and now David is an exiled king in the desert of Judah. And this Psalm comes out of him where you almost hear him saying I'm just sick of this. God, I just want you. I just want you. I'm so sick of being thirsty and hungry all the time. Where are you? I need to drink of you. My whole body longs for you. I thirst for my God. As David speaks this way, it's as if you hear resonating that there are not enough crowns, there is not enough success in the world to satiate my desire for you, God. I need you, Lord. You feel it just coming through the Psalm as he says my whole body and my soul thirsts for you. It's the idea like when your mouth is filled with chocolate as you're selling chocolates in Chatsworth. You just would do anything for a glass of water.

Have you ever felt that way? Especially for you who are believers, you've been in the church a long time and you've been walking and following God diligently and yet you find yourself in a place where you're going through the rhythms, you do the same rote thing over and over, and yet your thirst is not quenched. And you say God, where are you? I'm thirsty for you. Anyone feel that way? You just desire to be plunged into God's presence and experience him as you used to. God has a word for you today, if that's you.

In Psalm 42, David echoes another Psalm of longing that's famous: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so does my soul long for you." My soul thirsts for God. You know this idea that the soul is just thirsty for God. And I just want to begin by this. No matter who you are, I know many watching on television you say I'm not religious at all. And many of you who are in the church are that way, too. Your girlfriend dragged you here today and I barely have your attention. Some of you are the same way, too. You're different. You've grown up in a religious household and yet all people share the same thing. All of us are thirsty. And though not all of us know what we're thirsty for, all of us are thirsty for the same thing. We're thirsty for God. It's as if every human heart is a vacuum. Think of a vacuum cleaner. Like think of the ones like when you go to the gas station with just that big nozzle. This is what very often the unsettled

hurried desperate heart is like. It becomes like a vacuum cleaner that no matter where you go, there is this giant sucking sound as you desire to draw just about anything into your life that will appease this thirst that you carry with you.

Blasé Pasqual recognized this. Many think of Blasé Pasqual as a famous mathematician, but he was also a theologian. And he actually came to faith through math, isn't that great? He decided that he was going to become a Christian because the math didn't work out the other way. It was a bizarre way of gambling, actually. It was called Pasqual's Wager, and he decided if I don't believe in God, and I'm wrong, I'm in big trouble. But if I do believe in God, and I'm wrong, I'll never know. And so based on that bizarre rational, he says I guess I'll just believe in God because there's no risk in it, right? So he decides that through the mind of a gambler that the good bet is to believe and follow God.

And so he comes to God in a way that is very intellectual. It's in his mind. And as he writes later, he says that he made sort of a mental decision to follow God, but nothing really changed in his life. And later, he had a conversion from his head into his heart where he truly experienced God, not because of some rational thought, not because he worked the math out, but because something deep and relational happened between God and him. He went from learning about God, to

experiencing God and man let me tell you there's a big difference. There's a big difference. And Pasqual was famous for saying all of us have within our hearts a hole that is in the shape of God. Only God fits in that hole. It's like an incomplete puzzle piece. The most beautiful part of the piece in the middle is missing and God is that piece.

Friends, some of you are searching, you're longing, and you don't know what you're looking for. You are thirsting for God and he's waiting for you if you would just have faith and reach out to him.

St. Augustine, who was one of Pasqual's biggest influencers, was from Africa and he also had an experience where he came to faith in the fifth century through his head, but not in his heart, and eventually had this incredible experience with God where he realized that something deeper had to happen. It couldn't just be in his head. He had to have a complete experience of God's love, life, and presence, and then he said these famous words: "Our hearts are restless till they rest in him." Our hearts are restless till they rest in him. Our hearts are thirsty till they drink of him. Our hearts are hungry till they eat of him. You will never stop searching until you find God. He is the final destination and you look into other things for life, you look into other things to be satiated, you look into other things for peace. You will not find them until you find God. And when you find God and experience him to the fullest, your

whole life will be transformed. But you can't just learn about God, you have to experience him. You can't just read about him, you have to be with him, you have to be baptized in his spirit. And until that happens, you will remain hungry and you will remain thirsty, and you will remain restless. But God offers us true peace, true life.

Too often, when we have this feeling of hunger and thirst in our life, we turn to other things, usually good things, and they become idols. And so we turn to things like friendships; even become a way that we try to fill that void. And entertainment becomes a way that we fill that void. And shopping becomes a way that we fill that void. Work becomes a way we fill that void. Very often, it becomes substance. It becomes sex. It becomes other things that we think, "If I get enough of this, someday then I will be filled." But you won't be. Not until you find, and not just find, but experience God to the fullest.

You know, being in the world that we're in, we have so much available to us, and yet that blessing can very often become our greatest curse. For those of us who are thirsty, very often it's like being on a survival boat in the middle of the ocean. You're surrounded by water, but if you drink any of it, you're going to be even thirstier. You can't drink salt water. That's the maddening thing about being on a deserted island is you're surrounded by water and yet you can't find any real water to

drink. If you drink salt water, you'll dehydrate faster, and eventually you'll go crazy. Don't do it. And very much of the time we who are thirsty find ourselves like people in a life raft who are thirsty surrounded by water. Do you ever feel that way?

When we reach out for these other things to satiate the hunger and the thirst that is the human condition, it's like scratching a mosquito bite. We all know you're not supposed to do it, but when you do it, it feels good, doesn't it? When you got that mosquito bite, you know not to scratch it. It's like willpower. I will not scratch you. And then someday, something happens, somebody hurts our feelings, and we're like that's it. And it blisters and it itches even more.

And this is what the human condition is, isn't it? For you who are religious, this is a source of suffering - the fact that you want the things that you know harm you. You want to go into credit card debt. You want to scream at somebody who cuts you off in traffic. You want to dive back into your addictions. Right? You want to dive back into all of these things. You want to reach out to flood your life with friendships that normally that would be a good thing, but your friends become like an idol to you. You're trying to fill your void with even people. There are some of you who are even using religious tradition to fill the void and it's still not enough. Even religion, even the bible cannot, and I hate saying it, but

even the bible cannot replace truly experiencing God. Anything can become an idol if it is not God, and we need him in our life. Can I get an amen?

Psalm 27 then, we ask the question, well what do I do? I find myself thirsty, I find myself wanting to turn to these things. What do I do? Psalm 27 gives us the answer. It finishes with this word: "Wait for the Lord, take heart." Wait for the Lord, take heart. The first thing that we have to understand is when you are on the life raft, don't drink the salt water. Wait. Wait for fresh water. It's coming. Very often, the process of waiting to experience God is the very thing that helps us grow as individuals. Living in the midst of the hunger and in the midst of the thirst, very often is the thing that causes us to grow. To become the kind of people that can be world changers. Winter is an important part of the life of any plant. We don't like winter in America, do we? We want summer and fall all the time. We want to be harvesting, harvesting, harvesting. We even do that to our food, and it's a sign of our spiritual place where we decide to use anything we can to make food big, plump and harvest, all the time. For us, if you want to be healthy, winter, winter is an important part of the life of every plant. It's that famous axiom that things don't grow on the mountaintop, right? They only grow in the valley.

And very often the times when we're the most thirsty for God is the time when God is changing us and working in us in some of the best ways. And we oftentimes don't see it when we're there, but we look back and we recognize God was doing a work in my life. Friends, if that's where you are, don't drink the salt water. Don't scratch your mosquito bite. Wait. Be patient. I am convinced that impatience is the greatest enemy to happiness in the modern world today. Nobody's willing to wait, nobody's willing to be patient, everybody's always in a hurry, and you're never present. When you're with family on a beautiful night, you're thinking about work tomorrow. Be present with your family. When you're waiting on whatever it is.

We have to move. We want to move into a house we want to hear back from them. And I find myself like not being happy because I want to know about my house, right? And this is me, too. All of us, we live in this reality of constant hurry and impatience. We want to know what tomorrow holds but when we arrive at tomorrow, we're looking to the next day. It's like this deli we go to where there's a sign on the wall that says, "Free beer tomorrow." So every time you go in, it still says, "Free beer tomorrow." And that's how many of our lives are. We're constantly living in tomorrow. We're impatient. We get mad at God because he doesn't work like a microwave. He's not a drive through kind of God.

Waiting on the Lord and living in the thirst is an important part of growing as a disciple to Jesus. Can I get an amen?

Sometimes, however, waiting on the Lord does become a rut, and I want to speak to that, too. Because in that same line from Psalm 27, he says, "Wait on the Lord," but after that, he says, "Be strong, take heart." Be strong and take heart. Take heart means to be like courageous. Take heart means do something brave. And for many of us, the valley, I mean if you've been there a long time, some of you are saying Bobby, I've been here a long time. Then I have a word for you. Don't wait anymore. Stop waiting. For some of you who your valley has become a rut, it's probably because it's time to do something brave. It's time to do something courageous. Many of you have never shared your faith with anyone in your whole life. Many of you have never prayed with a stranger going through difficult times. Can I tell you something? As a believer, there are few things in this world that give me more life than seeing the light of the Holy Spirit come into somebody's eyes. If you want something to bring you out of a rut, share your faith with someone. You're like oh, ha ha, no, no sir. Fine! Enjoy the rut. Look, I'm telling you, that God teaches us, God nurtures us so that we are trained to be world changers. Being a world changer is not comfortable. The great commission is not easy. It's a scary thing. Jesus tells his disciples leave your home! Leave your stuff and go to a distant land. It's going to be very dangerous. You live in a

world in which you could be murdered, or robbed, and I just want you to go and I want you to die as a martyr and share your faith.

If the first thing you're thinking about when it comes to sharing your faith, or praying with a stranger, or something like that, if you think to yourself that would be socially awkward, you're the perfect person to do it because you understand social norms. You'll do it the right way. In fact, the guy that probably doesn't need to do it is like heck yeah, I'm going out there, I'll pray for everybody, I'm going to witness to everyone. That's the guy that might want to go on retreat and just chill out for a while.

It's the person who thinks that's really scary, I don't know what I would say, that would be weird; you're going to be the right person because you understand social norms. But it still takes courage. But you'll do it the right way. I know, because ever since I sent out the invitation next time somebody says they're doing okay, you ask them what's wrong, they tell you what's wrong, you say can I pray for you? I've had four of you tell me that you actually did it. I'm proud of you. Good job. And all of them were awesome stories. And for all four of those people, it was really hard to say can I pray for you? It was hard to say that, right? But friends if you are in a rut, if you have been in an eternal winter, it's time to do something brave for God. And I don't mean like

jump off a cliff or something, that's brave for you. I mean share your faith with someone. I mean offer to pray with someone who is suffering. I mean to give a gift to a neighbor or someone who is in need that is a scary amount. I mean doing something that is a big risk, and it's not for you, it's for God.

I remember when I was in high school and I decided after leading the first person ever to faith that it was like an addiction, like telling people about Jesus. It brought me so much life. The thing that was amazing about it was I first started with this sort of like somewhat popular kids in the school and the nice kids, and they just were not interested in my religion. But when I talked to a heroin addict at our school who was in the occult, she loved what I was talking about. And then I realized God's called me to witness to the bad kids. I'm still doing that, by the way. That's you. It's you.

And I remember that one of the first guys that was following me was the drug dealer in our school. And he didn't quit dealing drugs when he started following me. He was following me around and talk to me about the bible and he was like, hang on one second; I have to make a deal. I'll be right back and he'd come back. I just lived in that. But I found that when I went to college and I stopped being around the bad kids and I stopped witnessing and sharing my faith, that I entered into a

winter in my life. Very often, the only way you're going to get out of your rut is if you act in faith and do something brave for God. Do something brave for God today. Do it right now. Do something brave for the Lord and you will drink of his water again. God honors those who take faith and trust in him and not in themselves. He blesses them with his spirit, with favor, and with his power because they're doing his work. Do something brave for the Lord today. Can I get an amen?

I'll just finish with this last story. So I was living at my house on Palm Street and these two guys would come to the door. Let's call them Elder Smith and Elder Johnson. And that was the funny thing. They never told me their first names. I even asked them. I was like what's your first name? You're 18 and you have zits on your face. I'm not going to call you Elder Johnson. He says you can just call me Elder. I said, oh, I'm sorry Elder Johnson. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

So these two guys would come to my door, and they would say 'hi we're from the Church of Latter Day Saints. We want to share our faith with you.' And I always told the same joke. Can I get you a cup of coffee, a beer, a glass of wine? It was every time. And so we would sit and we would talk for like an hour and a half. These guys would just linger. They came in like their short sleeve button up shirt, with a nametag, and the little helmet and everything, and we would sit and talk. And this started

happening, Hannah, like what, once or twice a week almost. These guys had just begun their two-year missionary trip to California. And one of them came from Ohio and I think the other one came from, I don't know Cincinnati, Chicago, or something.

Anyway, so they would come and sit, and over two years, the three of us became very good friends. And we would debate Mormon theology versus Christian theology back and forth, and we'd get into all of this stuff and I'd always make the same joke: Can I get you a glass of tea, cup of coffee, a beer, a glass of wine, something like that. Water is fine, thank you. And by the end of their thing, we'd become dear friends. It was two years, and we sat down and I said 'so I just have to know.' What was weird is I started giving them advice on how to convert people better. I know you shouldn't do that, but they wore white long-sleeved shirts and I encouraged them to roll up the sleeves. It looks cooler. And get a skater helmet. Don't wear this.

So at the end, I said guys, I'm just curious. How many people did you baptize or convert on your two-year mission? They looked at each other and they said no one. So not one person converted in your two-year mission? He said no. I said well what did you do? They said well we basically went door to door and it was really hard. They said people would sic their dogs on them. They said people would slam the door in

their face. They said people that claimed to be Christians would cuss them out. They said one guy arrived at the door with a gun. And they said when we're having a really, really rough day, we'd look at each other and we'd say let's go to Pastor Bobby's house. And they would come and they would sit with me for a couple of hours, and time would go by and I would encourage them to go to the next house.

But they would come to me for encouragement, which was really neat because even though I know they're Mormon and everything, it's something that made me feel good, first of all, that they were touched, but this is the thing that I wanted to point out. The question in my mind was why would the LDS church send their kids on missionary trips? Why would they do that if nobody's converting to faith? You know why? Because they're building the missionaries themselves. Because those two guys through all of that difficulty; it's scary when somebody pulls a gun on you for sharing your faith, to get up the next morning and knock on another door. Let me tell you something: whether they're right or wrong, they had a conviction for faith. Why? Because they were doing something brave! If you find yourself in a rut, do something brave for God or stay in your rut! Do something brave for God or stay in your rut. Do something brave for God or stay in your rut forever! Because if you don't do something today, you'll never do it! Am I right?

Doing something brave for God brings life to us. And so some of you, especially if you're in ministry, you need to stop and wait. You know who you are. Some of us, we need to wait, we need to live in the thirst. But if you've been thirsty for a long time, it's time to activate the Holy Spirit that lives inside of you.

Would you bow your heads with me? I want to invite everyone who is in this church today and everyone watching on television, if you want to know the Lord, to pray this prayer with me. And even if you're already a believer, pray this prayer with me: Father in heaven, I am thirsty for you. Forgive me of my sins. Make me your student. Give me your Holy Spirit and teach me what it means to live your life, in Jesus' name, amen, amen.