

The Way into God's Presence

Favorite Psalms Part 31
Psalm 42-43 pt.2 12-6-2015

Summary: First become thirsty for God's presence by interpreting the anxieties and sorrows of your soul as cravings for Him. When you are thirsty enough, you'll start seeking God, and that begins at the altar (deal with your sin through repentance and trust in the work of Christ on the cross). Then, cry out to God in prayer like the psalmist did. Next, immerse yourself in the light and truth that God has sent forth in His Word. Then walk through the day interpreting everything you see through the lens of those truths, so that everything you do all day long turns into a little act of fellowship with God.

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Psalm 42 For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. **2** My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? **3** My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" **4** These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. **5** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and **6** my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. **7** Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. **8** By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life. **9** I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" **10** My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" **11** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior (the salvation of my face) and my God.

Psalm 43: **1** Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. **2** You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? **3** Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. **4** Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. **5** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Introduction

If you are depressed, does that mean something is wrong with you? Is it an indication that you are spiritually immature? The answer to the first question is *yes*, and the answer to the second one is *no*. Does it mean you are spiritually immature when you get depressed? No. Anybody here want to accuse the guy who wrote these psalms of being spiritually immature? From the heading we see that he was a worship leader. Do you think he should have been asked to step down from his position as worship leader until he got his emotions under control? No. Rather than asking him to step down, God took his prayer and put it in the Holy Scriptures as a model for all the saints throughout the centuries. God wants us to imitate this man – he is a model believer. If you ever find yourself looking down on someone or assuming someone is spiritually unhealthy because he's depressed, you need to realize that that person may be one of the spiritual giants like these men who wrote these psalms.

So, are you a bad Christian if you're depressed? No. But what about the first question? If I am depressed, does that mean something's wrong with me? Yes, of course something is wrong with me. It is obvious from reading this psalm that the psalmist regarded his depression as a problem that needed to be fixed. The entire prayer is an effort to recover from his depression.

God wants us to have joy in Him. When we don't – when our sorrow gets bigger than our joy, something is wrong. That happens even to the most godly, spiritually mature people among us. It doesn't mean you are a failure as a Christian; it just means you get a flat tire and you need to get it fixed. And these two psalms teach us how to do that.

Review

I told you last week that the principles in this psalm can be summed up under three main headings.

Pray for help, Enjoy the presence of God, Preach to your soul.

Last week we covered the first one briefly. I didn't spend a lot of time on that, not because prayer isn't important, but because we just did a whole sermon series on prayer at the end of our study of James, so that's still fresh in our memory. If you weren't here for that, I would strongly urge you to go back and listen to those messages – especially the first two. If you are down and discouraged or depressed, pray for help.

Enjoy God's Presence

The second point I just introduced last time: the E in PEP - *Enjoy* the presence of God. That is the biggest theme in these two psalms. Does he pray for relief from his suffering? Yes - one time. But a much greater concern in his heart is his desperate desire to meet with God. He begins and ends with that, and it permeates the entire prayer. That is his big priority because he knows what he needs more than relief is joy. What good is relief going to do if he's still depressed? What good will it do if I can get rid of all my financial troubles, or all my relationship troubles, or health problems or work problems or family problems if, after I get rid of them, I'm still down and discouraged and joyless?

Imagine someone who is desperately ill because of prolonged dehydration and malnutrition. Some infection made his throat swell up so he could hardly eat or drink, and so now he is really sick. So the doctor gives him some medicine, clears up the throat problem, and the guy goes home and feels just as miserable as ever. Why? Because he is still dehydrated and malnourished. The hardships and troubles in your life are like that sore throat. They make it hard to eat and drink from God's banquet table. Getting rid of your problems might make it easier for you to eat and drink. (Not always, but in some cases it might.) But even if it does, that doesn't get you anywhere unless you actually eat and drink.

So how does one eat and drink? How do you enjoy the presence of God in a way that functions like water to your thirsty soul, and food to your starving inner man? Let's see what we can learn from these psalms.

Thirst

42:2 My soul thirsts for God

Before you can really enjoy God's presence, you have to get yourself thirsty for it. Drinking water is actually an unpleasant thing to do when you're not thirsty. But the thirstier you are, the more you enjoy it. A meal is so much better when you're hungry.

One of the benefits of suffering is it enables you to experience attributes of God you could never otherwise experience. The angels will never know what it's like to experience God as a refuge in times of trouble. They will never know what it feels like for God to pull them up out of the pit. So many of the attributes of God in this psalm are aspects of the glory of God that can only be experienced by someone who is suffering. Savior, shelter, stronghold – those are attributes of God that you are able to experience only when you are in trouble. So praise God for your suffering. When we are full all the time, we take food for granted and we cease to be able to enjoy it. We need hardships in order to keep our appetite going. We need to go dry before we can be thirsty enough to drink. You can try to discipline yourself to read your Bible and pray and go to church, but your commitment to those things will only last a short time if you're not really thirsty. To really drink deeply, you have got to be thirsty.

Interpret Longings as Thirst for God

So how do you make yourself thirsty for God? Do what the psalmist did. Interpret all the longings of your soul for what they really are – a need for God. When you misinterpret the groanings of your heart, it makes you thirsty for the wrong thing. If you get really lonely and you interpret that as a need for a friend or a need for a spouse, then you will be energized to run after a friend or a spouse. But if you interpret it as what it really is (need for God), that will energize you to seek hard after God. If you get really sick, and that takes away your joy, if you interpret that misery as a need for physical health, that will energize you to pursue physical health. But if you interpret it for what it really is – a need for the presence of God, you will be energized to run hard after God.

You see, suffering isn't really a problem unless it takes away your joy. If you still have joy greater than your distress, it's not a big problem. But when it does manage to diminish your joy so much that now your sorrow is greater than your joy, the remedy is to experience the presence of God. That's the only thing that can bring the joy back. Look at how he describes God in 43:4.

4 Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight.

Literally that phrase is to **God, the gladness of my rejoicing**. Can you think of a more delightful description of God anywhere in the Bible than that? What is God like? He is **the gladness of my rejoicing**. When I rejoice – whenever I have joy and happiness, the core of that happiness, the nucleus, is God. Now, there is a shallow, temporary, counterfeit version of joy that comes from sin. But that is never a real joy. This is talking about authentic, deep, lasting, profound happiness that is greater than the sorrows in your life. And whatever tool God uses to give me that happiness, the happiness itself comes from His presence. If I get that happiness through some time spent with my wife, or by seeing my kids, or by enjoying some part of God's creation, or from some really good food, or a cool Jeep or a new gun - sometimes those things don't bring me joy, but whenever they do, whenever those things start my heart rejoicing and I am able to enjoy them, that's God at work. He is the gladness beneath all my rejoicing. Whenever I have true happiness in my life, if I get a shovel and start digging down, I'll see the root of it is God enabling me to enjoy one of His gifts. And the more aware I am of that, the more I am experiencing the presence of God.

The psalmist understood that, which is why he wanted to meet with God even more than he wanted relief from his suffering. He wanted that joy and happiness. And if God used this tool to bring it or that tool to bring it, or no tool at all and just gave it directly, none of that matters. The only thing that matters is experiencing His presence. That is the only thing that will bring the joy back.

The problem is, we don't naturally think that way. It takes a conscious effort to diagnose the problem of our sadness or depression as a craving for the presence of God. So whenever you suffer and it starts stealing your joy, just remind yourself *If I were to experience the presence of God right now, I would have joy even if this suffering continued.* Continually reminding yourself of that is how you increase your thirst for God. Keep doing that, and eventually your thirst for God will become so extreme that it will drive you to do whatever it takes to run hard after Him. Your soul is already desperately thirsty for God, but it takes a lot of work to convince yourself of that.

When I get physically thirsty, I never crave the wrong thing. I never misinterpret that dry mouth feeling as a craving for sawdust or dirt or anything other than a real drink. I am so convinced that water is the solution to my dry throat that the sensation of a dry throat is exactly the same as desire for water. The sentence, "I'm thirsty," means two things to me. It means my throat is dry, and it means I desire water. And the goal is to get that way with thirst for God. So that whenever my soul is dry, and I'm lacking joy, that feeling of joylessness is exactly the same thing as desire for the presence of God in my heart. I want to get to where the sentence, "I'm sad," or "I'm afraid," or "I'm overwhelmed," or "I'm worried" – that those sentences mean, "I want more of the presence of God."

So it can be a process just to get to the point of being thirsty for God. But this guy is already there at the beginning of this psalm.

Psalm 42:2 My soul thirsts for God

He already feels it. For some of us, we have some work to do to correct some taste bud malfunctions so that instead of craving all kinds of other things, we realize that what the soul is really thirsty for is the presence of God.

Seek God

So, that is the beginning point – get thirsty. Once you do that, you will do whatever it takes to drink. But what does it take? It takes some seeking. Before you will be able to experience the presence of God as your food and drink, first you have to find His presence, which means you must seek Him.

He starts the prayer by saying **as the deer pants....** The word translated **pants** literally means *to bend toward*, or *to be inclined toward*, or *to look toward* something. The idea isn't so much of the deer panting as much as looking for water. So I think instead of the word **pant**, a better translation might be the word **search**. **As the deer searches for streams of water, so my soul searches for you O God.** Scripture speaks a lot about seeking God.

1 Chronicles 22:19 Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God.

We are commanded to seek His presence. And the criterion for success is that we seek wholeheartedly.

Deuteronomy 4:29 if ...you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.

God will not demean Himself by allowing Himself to be found by halfhearted seekers. And so this man is searching for God like a deer searching for water. And he is doing that as a way of life. It's not just once a week at church, or once a day during his prayer time – it is wherever he is all day long.

6 My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

Mt. Hermon is a very high mountain, and Mizar means "smallness." We don't know of any mountain that was actually called Mizar, so I think the best translation would be ...the heights of Hermon, or a little hill. **The land of the Jordan** most likely refers to Israel. **Hermon** is plural in the Greek, probably referring to the entire mountain range. So I think what he is saying is something like, "I will remember You no matter where I am – at home, away, atop the highest peak, or on the smallest hill." No matter

where I'm located geographically, I am searching to find Your presence spiritually.¹ He is seeking hard after God, but it's not working. He is still dry.

If you have some idea that all you have to do to experience the presence of God when you're down is to just spend 10 minutes seeking Him, and there He is - go back to the Psalms. Look at this guy. He is a godly man, he is thirsty for God, and he is desperately seeking hard after God, and all he's getting from heaven is a dial tone. He wants to drink deeply from the Spring of living water, but it's not happening. His soul is dried up. Even when you seek God wholeheartedly, the results may be delayed. God may test you to see how serious you really are. Are you going to keep seeking Him even if it takes a long time? Are you going to give up and run after some substitute?

It is not happening yet for this guy, but he has no plan B. His only option is to find a way into the presence of God. So at the end of Psalm 43 he cries out to God to guide him into God's presence.

43:3 Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.

As His children, we always have access to His presence to some degree. But the kind of access that will take this guy from the depths of despair back into joy – that just doesn't happen with the snap of your fingers. So far all his searching hasn't gotten him there, and so he begs God to help him.

Go to the Altar

“Guide me into Your dwelling place God!”

And then he says this: “God, if You do that – if You guide me toward Yourself,”

4 Then will I go to the altar of God

That is your first stop on your way in to go see God – **the altar of God**. The altar is where sacrifices were offered. That's where you receive forgiveness of sins. If you want to draw near to God, at the doorway leading to His presence is an altar. It has to start there, because until your sins and guilt are dealt with, it is impossible to approach God's presence.

This guy was a worship leader in the Temple, so he already knew where the physical altar was. That's not what he is talking about. He is talking about what that physical altar represented - the spiritual reality of having his sin dealt with so that there is nothing hindering his relationship with God. He is talking about the same thing David talked about in Psalm 51 when he said the sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit. He wants to find that place of forgiveness and reconciliation with God through faith.

In the Old Testament that was symbolized through the animal sacrifices. But we know that those sacrifices were just a picture that pointed to the ultimate sacrifice for sin – the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross in our place. So when you and I go to the altar of God, that happens when we consider what Jesus did on the cross, and we receive that gift of redemption and forgiveness. Going to the altar of God means confessing your sin to God, repenting of that sin, and welcoming and trusting in the gift of His forgiveness. If you don't do that, then no matter what else you do you will never approach the presence of God. Sin and guilt have to be dealt with first.

¹ This Old Testament saint already understood a little bit of what Jesus was saying to the woman at the well when He said “**The time is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ... True worshipers will worship in spirit and in truth**” (John 4:21-22).

Most of the commentators interpret this as his desire to go to the Temple in Jerusalem. They say he must have been exiled and he was longing to go back to the Temple. I don't think that's what he is saying, because of the solution he asks for in 43:3, where he asks God to send light and truth to guide him to God's dwelling place and altar. He wouldn't have needed special guidance to find the physical Temple in Jerusalem. He is searching for the spiritual temple. The light and truth that he is asking for are not a physical roadmap or a GPS set for Jerusalem. It is spiritual guidance that can show him how to enter into the presence of God.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is big enough to cover any sin, no matter how horrendous. It is big enough to cover all your sins no matter how numerous. And it doesn't matter how many times you have gone to the altar before. Every time you go there, He will forgive you. And then you can proceed into His presence.

Be Guided by His Light and Truth

So when you get discouraged or fall into depression, how do you get out of that darkness? First get yourself thirsty enough to start seeking God. Then go to the altar and get your sins taken care of so you're not shut out of His presence. And then you are ready to draw near to Him.

But how? You are not going to know how intuitively. You are going to need two guides.

43:3 Send forth your light and your truth. Let them guide me. Let them bring me your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.

The only way it is going to happen is if God provides His truth and then gives light, which means He opens your eyes to understand that truth. And for us that comes in the Scriptures. We don't find the presence of God through arbitrary mysticism. It doesn't happen through being a good enough Christian and earning your way into His presence. It doesn't come through rituals or ceremonies or incantations. It doesn't come through seniority in the faith – doesn't matter how long you have been a Christian. It doesn't come through music. Some people think if they get caught up in corporate praise, and it becomes really emotional and gripping, that's the way into the presence of God. No. People who think that way get into all kinds of wacky doctrines, because they try to figure out what's true by how they feel instead of from the Scriptures.

No, the only way into His presence is the way God Himself has mapped out in His Word. This is why we are constantly studying the Bible. It is not because we are into academics; it is not because we want to become a bunch of eggheads or experts or scholars. We tear into the Scriptures every day because we are saying the same thing this guy is saying – “Send forth Your light and truth to guide me into Your dwelling place.”

If you want to experience the presence of God, you must crack this book open. Don't leave it on your shelf all week from Sunday to Sunday. You have to crack it open.

Secondly, it has to crack you open. The truth isn't enough – we need the light that enables us to understand and believe and appreciate and delight in the truth. If all you do is read the Bible for information, all that will do is make your depression an informed depression. You could get a PhD in theology, then you would have a scholarly depression. But the goal isn't informed depression or scholarly depression; the goal is joy. We approach the Scriptures not as a student trying to master a textbook, but like a newborn baby craving pure, spiritual milk – sucking with all its might to draw out from his mother nourishment to sustain his life. Seek God in the Scriptures. Read a passage, and ask, what does this tell me about what God is like? What does this tell me about His will? What does it tell me about what kinds of things are pleasing to Him?

“God, open my eyes to see how this is relevant for my life today.”

If your Bible reading is dry, get with a mentor, or your pastor, or someone who can help you encounter God in the Scriptures.

Improve Your Theology

One of the healthiest things you can ever do is to open up to a psalm, and write down every attribute of God that is stated or implied in that psalm. And then let that list correct your natural ways of thinking about God. Our perception of what God is like is always getting corrupted by human wisdom, and it's in constant need of correction. It's like the alignment on your car – it just gets out of line every so often and needs to be straightened out. Let the truth and light of the Scriptures shape your outlook, and your way of thinking about God, yourself, and circumstances. And keep that up until you have an attitude about God

like this man's attitude. One thing that really stands out in this psalm is this man's attitude about God. We saw last week that he felt like he had been rejected and forgotten by God.

42:9 "Why have you forgotten me?"

43:2 Why have you rejected me?

That's how he felt, but did he really believe that he had been rejected and forgotten by God? No. If he really believed that, he wouldn't be praying this prayer. If you want to know what he really believes about God, just look all at the ways he describes God throughout the prayer.

- **God, my God (43:4)**
- **my Savior and my God (42:5,11, 43:5)**
- **the God of my life (42:8)**
- **God my Rock (42:9)**
- **God my stronghold (43:2)**
- **God, the gladness of my rejoicing (43:4)**

Suffering and hardship can ruin you or improve you. They can hurt you or help you. They can make you bitter or better. And the biggest factor that determines which way it goes is what you believe about what God is like. If you want to recover from discouragement or depression it is absolutely essential that you allow the truth of God's Word to improve your conception of what God is like.

If you read both these psalms out loud slowly, it takes less than two minutes. I don't know about you, but when I pray a quick, two-minute prayer, it usually doesn't have a dozen different attributes of God sprinkled through it. How did he come up with all that? Did he pull out his Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* and look up a list of attributes of God to beef up his prayer? It is possible he did something like that, but I think it's a lot more likely that he talked to God this way because this was just the way he thought about God. He called Him **my God** because he knew without question that he had a special, covenant relationship with God. He called Him **my Savior**, because he knew that God was the only one who could possibly rescue him from this trouble. And he knew that God had already promised to be his Savior. The conception that he had in his mind of God was that He is a rescuing, saving God who has compassion on His people and who would never reject them or forget them. He called Him **the God of my life** because he can sense that all his strength and vitality and life comes, minute-by-minute, from the living God.² He called Him **God my Rock** because he felt shaky and unstable, like his life was spinning out of control, and he was sinking down into the mud, and when he assessed his situation, it really did seem to him like the only way he could regain stability in his life would be to rest upon God. He called Him **God my stronghold** because the attacks coming at him were like bunker busting bombs that would smash right through any other shelter he tried to run to, and it really felt like the only safety he could ever have would be if he could experience God as a shelter and stronghold. And he called Him **God, the gladness of my rejoicing** because he knew that all the joy of life comes from God. He knew that there was absolutely no hope of having joy again except through encountering the nearness of God's presence.

He wasn't just reciting a list of attributes he learned in Bible college. He was talking to God and addressing Him with titles that described how he felt about God.

A.W. Tozer was right - the most important thing about you is what comes to your mind when you think about God.

Your conception of what God is like will determine the trajectory of your life.

² In v.2 he referred to God as **the living God**. The phrase here is the same as that phrase with the addition of just one letter in the Hebrew.

Personal

And it's personal. Notice all the "my's." In Psalm 42:

5 ...my Savior and my God

8 ...the God of my life

9 ... God my Rock

11 ... My Savior and my God

Then in Psalm 43:

2 ... You are God my stronghold

4 ... God, the gladness of my rejoicing

4 ... O God, my God

5 ... my Savior and my God

This was not detached, theoretical, abstract theology. It was intensely personal. Not "the Savior" or even "our Savior," but "my Savior, my Rock, my God, my stronghold, my joy, the God of my life." The next time Satan tries to convince you that God has rejected you, try this: Just say, "Ok fine. Let's assume for a moment that God did reject me." God has completely rejected you. Would that bother you? If the thought of being rejected by God deeply troubles you, that is really strong evidence that God has not rejected you. If God rejected you so that you didn't belong to Him, and you didn't have the Holy Spirit in you, then you wouldn't care about God. You wouldn't care if God accepted you or rejected you. You wouldn't have any love for God or any fear of God, and His approval or disapproval wouldn't matter to you. The very fact that Satan thinks he can hurt you by telling you that God has rejected you is evidence that you care about God's opinion. And if you care about God's opinion, that's good evidence that you are one of God's children. And if you are one of His children, he will never leave you or forsake you or abandon you or forget you, because, just as the psalmist said, He is *your* God and your Savior.

Controlling Faith

Someone might object: "Didn't you just get done saying that this man felt like God had rejected him and forgotten him?"

Yes, that's how it felt.

"How does that fit together with him thinking that God is his Savior and his rock and his stronghold?"

It doesn't. It doesn't fit together at all – that's why he is so perplexed. When he observes what God is doing, what he sees doesn't match what he knows to be true about God. He knows that God is his stronghold, and yet when he makes observations about his life, it looks like just the opposite. His theology tells him that God is his stronghold, and his experience and observations tell him that God abandoned him and rejected him. His theology tells him that God is his Savior, but his experience and observations tell him that God has forgotten him.

But this man's theology runs deeper than his own observations about life. His belief in these attributes of God runs so deep – he knows them to be true way down deep at the controlling level of his life. And when I say "controlling level" I am talking about those things that you know so deeply that they control all your decisions and actions and perceptions even without consciously thinking about it.

A great example of that is your knowledge of gravity. Your knowledge of gravity controls the way you act and feel in every context. It's why you set your car keys down on a desk instead of trying to set them in midair. It controls how firmly you grip something when you pick it up. It controls how your emotions react when you get close to a cliff. It controls how you interpret a situation when you see

something moving through the air. Everything we do all day long takes gravity into consideration without you even consciously thinking about gravity. That is what it means to believe something at the controlling level.

And this guy's conception of God as his God and his Savior and the gladness of his rejoicing – he believed all that way down deep at the controlling level. He observes all kinds of evidence that God has rejected him and forgotten him. But he still thinks of God as his Savior and the gladness of his rejoicing. Why? Because you still believe in gravity even when you see things that seem to defy gravity. And maybe you can't explain them – something up in the air that seems like it should be dropping. I can't explain that, seeming like it's defying gravity, doesn't make sense – and all the while I'm saying that, I am still living my life as though gravity is still intact. When you see something that seems to defy gravity, you continue to believe in gravity and assume that what you see isn't what it appears. Our theology needs to run deeper than our own interpretations and observations of life.

His Song Is with Me

And one thing that can help with that is music.

42:8 By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me

Sometimes a song is the only thing that can get you through the night. Even though this guy is beyond miserable, still, he says, **I will praise you with the harp (43:4)**. When things really get dark, and your strength is gone, sometimes you just need all the best of God's truths to be pre-packaged for you in a song. That's why Christians sing so much. More than any other religion we are a singing bunch. We even sing about our sorrows. Horatio Spafford lost all his kids to a storm at sea and he wrote a hymn that troubled Christian hearts have clung to for the last hundred and forty years. When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul." Isaac Watts -

How long wilt Thou conceal Thy face? My God, how long delay?
When shall I feel those heav'nly rays That chase my fears away?
How long shall my poor laboring soul Wrestle and toil in vain?
Thy word can all my foes control And ease my raging pain.
How would the tempter boast aloud If I become his prey!
Behold, the sons of hell grow proud At Thy so long delay.
But they shall fly at Thy rebuke, And Satan hide his head;
He knows the terrors of Thy look, And hears Thy voice with dread.
The truths of God's Word are balm for the troubled soul.

And sometimes it takes the melody of a song to apply that balm and rub it in.

Summary

So how do you enjoy the presence of God? First you have got to be hungry and thirsty for it, and that comes through interpreting the anxieties and sorrows of your soul as cravings for God's presence. Once you get thirsty enough, you'll start seeking God, and that begins at the altar. Deal with your sin. If you are guilty anywhere else besides the altar, you are doomed. But at the altar of God there is forgiveness. So start there. Search your heart and see if there are any unconfessed sins, any cherished idols, anything your heart thinks it has to have in order to be happy, anything that makes you angry or drives you to a sinful response if you don't get it; repent of those things, and seek forgiveness from God on the basis of the cross. When there is sin in your life that hasn't been dealt with, that will bar the door of access to God's presence. So begin at the altar.

Then, cry out to God in prayer. A huge aspect of seeking nearness to God is earnest prayer. That is why this psalmist wrote the psalm – it was his effort to seek the presence of God through prayer. So pray prayers like this one and like Psalm 63. Make an assessment of your prayer life and figure out, "What is

the next step for me in deepening my prayer life?” and then just take that next step. Don’t try anything unrealistic that you know you won’t be able to follow through on long-term. Just bring it up one notch – take the next step.

Next, immerse yourself in the light and truth that God has sent forth in His Word. Open up your Bible every day and before you read a single word, ask God to open your eyes. Ask Him to send light. Ask Him to show you the way into His presence. Ask Him to open your eyes to what is beautiful and delightful about the attributes of God that you see on the pages of Scripture. Ask him to give you the faith to believe those at the controlling level, way down deep in your heart.

And then just walk through the day interpreting everything you see through the lens of those truths, so that everything you do all day long turns into a little act of fellowship with God. And every single time you see something through the lens of those truths about God and its delightful to you, every time you experience one of God’s attributes firsthand, and you connect the dots in your mind so that your soul understands “this delight I’m feeling right now is because of His presence,” that is what it means to draw near to God.

Benediction - 1 Thessalonians 3:12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) On a scale from 1 to 10 how would you describe your level of thirst for God’s presence right now? (1 = no desire at all; 10 = you’ll do whatever it takes to find it) What brought you to this point?
- 2) Which attribute of God would you most enjoy experiencing this coming week, and why? (God my refuge, strength, savior, deliverer, stronghold, joy, guide, healer, teacher, refreshment, sustenance, father, friend, sanctifier, vindicator, or _____)