



Session 4: Longing



We may long for lots of things in our lives – a good marriage, happiness, children, a pay rise, security.

These longings are not wrong in and of themselves. However, only God can ultimately and truly satisfy our deepest needs. As St Augustine once wrote, ‘You have made us only for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.’

Previous session review

- Recap on your experience of the previous challenge. How did it go? Was it helpful?
- If you weren’t able to try the challenge, explore the question: Where and how did you experience God last week?

Read

Read the passage several times through, slowly and prayerfully. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. At the end of the text you will find helpful background information in our ‘Setting the Scene’ section.

As you read, look out for shockers and blockers.

Shockers – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

Blockers – something from the text that raises questions for you.

Psalm 42

As a deer gets thirsty for streams of water, I truly am thirsty for you, my God. In my heart, I am thirsty for you, the living God. When will I see your face? Day and night my tears are my only food, as everyone keeps asking, “Where is your God?”

Sorrow floods my heart, when I remember leading the worshipers to your house. I can still hear them shout their joyful praises. Why am I discouraged? Why am I restless? I trust you! And I will praise you again because you help me, and you are my God. I am deeply discouraged as I think about you from where the Jordan begins at Mount Hermon and from Mount Mizar. Your vicious waves have swept over me like an angry ocean or a roaring waterfall. Every day, you are kind, and at night you give me a song as my prayer to you, the living Lord God.

You are my mighty rock. Why have you forgotten me? Why must enemies mistreat me and make me sad? Even my bones are in pain, while all day long my enemies sneer and ask, “Where is your God?” Why am I discouraged? Why am I restless? I trust you! And I will praise you again because you help me, and you are my God.

Setting the scene:

- Psalm 42 is the prayerful lament of a musician who longs to return to Jerusalem to serve God at the Temple. The tone of the Psalm suggests captivity and permanent separation from his homeland.
- The Psalmist faces taunts of ‘Where is your God?’ from those around him. He senses abandonment and discouragement deep down in his soul. But he comes back to God’s faithfulness and trusts God to help him.
- In the ancient world many worshipped gods made of gold, silver, wood and stone – idols that did not have life. In contrast the Psalmist believes and trusts in a living God who is able to satisfy his longing.
- Worship is a natural outpouring of our longing for God and an essential aspect of deepening our relationship with God.

Reflect

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your shockers and blockers. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore these questions:

Q1. When have you experienced a longing for God?

Q2. Describe a worship experience where you felt very close to God.

“The soul must long for God in order to be set aflame by God’s love; but if the soul cannot yet feel the longing, then it must long for the longing. To long for the longing is also from God.”

Meister Eckhart

Respond

Longing challenge: This session leads us to explore the theme of longing for God. As a group, create a challenge to increase a sense of worship in your life this week or choose one of the following:

Challenge ideas:

1. Pilgrimage

Take time to arrange a mini-pilgrimage. It could be as simple as taking a couple of hours or a morning off to travel to a significant destination – perhaps where you first encountered God or to meet with people who significantly inspired you. You might want to attend a worship event or conference. You could also visit a Cathedral or an old church. You might like to do this as a group. As an alternative you could tour key places such as Jerusalem or Iona via the web – cheaper and quicker! Pilgrimages remind us of our longing for God and of his faithfulness and goodness to us as Christ calls us to ‘Come and follow me.’

2. Meditation

Take time each day to read and reflect on Psalm 42. Read it slowly and use it as a prompt for to shape your prayers. Talk to God about your personal longing to be with him and for his Spirit to be at work in your life.

3. Sacrifice

In the Old Testament, worship was often linked to sacrifice and making an offering of grain or animals to God. This week, as an act of worship – consider a series of small sacrifices you could make. For instance you could donate the money you planned to spend on a dinner out to charity, give up a parking space or seat on the train, be the first up in your house to prepare breakfast (if you don’t already!), offer to put out the neighbour’s bins, do more than your fair share of the washing up. Think of each offering as a way of being obedient to God; that way your sacrifice will not be empty, but will show God honour and respect.

Group Prayer

You might like to commit to praying for each person in the group this week as you look to explore and experience more of the Spirit.