

For ten years, I have asked one question of the Evangelical community that I find my life woven in with by the grace of God. I have had one question on my heart, one question on my mind, one question that haunts me, one question that I still wrestle with what the answer is, one question that I feel like I've got to find the answer to. And it is one of those things that wakes me up at night and it's one of those things that worries me and it's one of those things that makes me cry and it's one of those things that makes me fast and it's one of those things that makes me wrestle. And I've got to know the answer. I used to ask the question all the time and write on it and think on it and study it and ask people about it. And then, I was recently reminded of the question again as I headed to Orlando to teach a bunch of young pastors and then as I got ready for Tom Bailey's funeral. And so, here's what I want to do for the next six weeks. This morning I simply want to ask the question. That's all I want to do. I want to ask the question, and then next week, I'm going to try to answer it. It's not an easy question to answer, but I'm going to try to answer it. And then in the month of June, we'll look at what the ramifications are to the answer of the question. And so, I know that all of this is lost on you because you don't know the question, but I just wanted to tel you and paint a little bit of where we're going.

And now, we're going to get into Psalm 42. It's going to take me awhile to get to the question. Psalm 42, let's look at it. Verse 1, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me continually, 'Where is your God?' These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival." Verse 5, I love verse 5. I love verse 5 because I see my own humanity in it. Look at verse 5. "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." Have you ever had that argument with yourself concerning God? I mean, have you ever had that moment where your mind knows what is right and good but all you've got in your soul is tears? Have you been there? The only people in this room are people who have been and liars or people who don't know Jesus. I love that he argues with himself right here. "Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God. It will get better." But it's honestly the first couple of verses that I want us to concentrate on. "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." Now, what we do in the Evangelical community at large is, we take this verse and we make it cute. What I mean by that is, we get a picture of a buck next to a stream, antlers all out, massive beautiful thing, and then on the back in cursive, we write, "As the deer pants for the water..." And I'm not dogging that shirt. Please God, I hope no one's wearing that shirt in here right now. It was either your Budweiser shirt or that one, and you wore that one. Here's why we have to be careful here, because this text isn't cute at all; it's agonizing. I mean, do you see what's happening here? He's basically saying this, "Like an animal that's dying because of a lack of water, that's where I find myself. When can I meet with God? When can I draw near again?" There's no indifference in this man. He is in agony, longing to be in that place where the Holy Spirit has filled him powerfully and he's walking intimately. And for whatever reason, he can't get there and he's frustrated and he can't sleep at night and he's weeping and he's pleading and he's recalling Scripture that he knows that God is faithful and he's wrestling with himself to know God deeper than he does. It's not cute, it looks horrible. It doesn't look like a t-shirt verse at all.

Look over at Psalm 63 and then we'll leave David alone. We'll pick it up at verse 1, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,..." The NIV uses the word "yearns." That's different from just wanting. Like, you can want something and you're like, "Oh, I want that." But yearning, I don't even know how to explain

it. It's just like a groan, you've got to have it. "...my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me." This is an interesting text because you don't know where to file it. Here's what I mean by that. There are passages of Scripture where men encounter God and the emotion and the behavior is one of reverence. So Isaiah sees God and says, "Woe is me. I'm a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen King." And he fall on the ground like a dead man. That's reverence. And then there are these other passages of Scripture where men appear to have this kind of camaraderie and friendship with God. And then there are texts like this that you don't know what to do with, because this is not friendship and it's not reverence either. I have a lot of good friends in here. I'm looking around, Jason Clark is over here. He's a good buddy of mine, and here's the deal. If I get to talk to him after the service and we do that weird hug thing that men do where we slap like this and then we bring in with our arm right here so our chests don't touch. And we do that hug thing and I'm going to say, "Hey man, how are you? How was your weekend? How are things going?" I'm not going to go, "My flesh yearns for you. My soul clings to you. Last night as I was laying in my bed through the watches of the night, I couldn't help but think of you constantly." Yeah, that ain't happening. In fact, this almost sounds like lust. I mean, this doesn't sound like "like," it sounds like lust. "Earnestly I seek You. My flesh longs for You. I think about You all night long. My soul clings to You. My lips speak of You." That sounds like lust, doesn't it? And a lot of you are like, "I don't lust. I don't know what you're speaking of right now." Trust me on this. This is lust. I mean, there's no indifference in this man. There's no quietly hoping that things will work out. He seems to be lusting.

I think we could go to a dozen different texts, but let's go to Habakkuk because I want to watch you try to find it. Don't think that I don't know that some of you are going to the front of your Bible and others of you are singing a little song with Old Testament books in your head right now. Habakkuk 3, we'll pick it up in verse 17. This is one of those prayers over our home. My wife and I love this text. It's where we want our hearts to be, and I don't know that we're there. The Lord will have to make us prove it if we're ever to find out, but we want to be there. "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places." Now, the reason why I find this text overwhelming and unbelievable is it basically says this, "I don't care what life throws me. God be praised. So, if I've got tons of food or if I have no food, praise Jesus. If I have a lot of money in the bank or I'm homeless, praise Jesus. If everything's working well for me and I've got great friends or I've got no friends, praise Jesus." It seems like there's no conditions on his love for the Lord here. And I don't know how in the world the prosperity guys deal with that text... and most of the rest of the Bible. I don't know how you look at this text and preach that if you follow Jesus, everything goes well, because in the end, Habakkuk goes, "Who cares how everything else goes if you get God. So whether I've got cancer and die at 33 or I live to be 104, praise Christ. And whether everything in my marriage is movie-esque and we flutter about in romantic harmony or every day is a battle to be faithful to one another and Jesus, praise God." This is a different kind of Christianity, isn't it? It seems like most of ours have conditions, but not Habakkuk.

Let's go New Testament. Let's go to Philippians 3. We'll pick it up in verse 8. "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." Now, this is an interesting text because he's asking a different question than most of us ask. He's not asking the question, "Is this right or is this wrong? Is this action right or is this action wrong? Is it okay for me to go here or is it not okay for me to go

here?" He basically says, "I pay attention to everything in my life, and anything that robs me from Christ and knowing Christ deeply, whether it is morally sinful or morally neutral, I get rid of it." This is an interesting way to view life. Because he's sitting back and saying, "'Right or wrong' is the wrong question. The question is 'Does this get me more of Jesus or does this rob me of knowing Jesus deeply?' Whether it's right or wrong isn't the question." That's what he's saying here. He goes, "I look at all areas of my life and I count it as loss, I count it as rubbish, I count it as dung." So he sits back and he goes, "Does my wealth prevent me and rob me of knowing Jesus deeply? If it does, I need to start giving away some cash. Does this group of people I'm running with rob me of my affections for Jesus? If it does, I need to change groups." And on and on and on we could go here. "I count it as rubbish. I count it as dung. I count it as loss. I'd gladly get rid of it so I could have more of Him." Now look at this next line. This is the line that blows my mind. Look at verse 10. "...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Let me tell you why I find this verse to be so compelling. The apostle Paul writes 75% of the New Testament. He's the only guy we know of in the history of our faith that walks into a city and preaches so powerfully and so effectively that the whole socio-economic system of the city shifts and people who make money from sinful endeavors actually start a riot because of it. His handkerchief and apron healed people. He walks in a power and an authority that no one we know walks in, and yet what does he say in verse 10? "I want to know Him. I want more." I read this, I'm like, "You're greedy. I'll take half of what you've got and die happy." I mean, he's greedy. I've been preaching here for four years and nobody's started a riot, not even a little one. Do you know how happy I would be if someone turned over a car and set it on fire because the gospel was going forth so powerfully? It's not just because I'm a dude and like to see stuff burn. No, there's been no socio-economic shift, none at all. This guy walks in an unreal amount of peace, he's insatiable. "More, I want more. I want more. I want more." It's like these men that we're reading, they want Him and then they get Him, they get to experience Him and they're just euphoric and then the next day, they're back to being greedy, they're back to being lustful. "Again, I want more of You again." It's why they really say insane things. "To die is gain." Why? "Because I get the fullness of Jesus. I can't wait to die." How often do you hear that and don't call the police or someone? "I'm looking forward to death because then I get Him in full." This is an interesting character we're reading here. All these guys are.

But listen, you can even step outside of the Bible, because this isn't just a biblical thing but it's honestly what's happened historically as people have encountered Jesus in the fullness of who Jesus is. Let me read you some other guys. These are some historic examples. Augustine says this, "How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose!... You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place, you who are sweeter than all pleasures, though not of flesh and blood; you outshine all light, yet are hidden deeper than any of the secrets in our heart; You who surpass all honor, though not in the eyes of men who see all honor in themselves....O Lord, my God, my light my wealth, my Salvation...you who are sweeter than all pleasures." Augustine had a sip of great wine and says, "This is good, but You're better." Augustine has sex and says, "This is good, but You're better." Augustine has wealth and he says, "This is good, but You're better by far." And on and on and on we could go. "You who are sweeter than all pleasures." Not just, "You who are sweeter than all suffering. No, You're better than the best of."

Let me read you Martin Luther. Luther says, "Oh I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you...do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

George Whitfield said of the book, "Pilgrim's Progress," by the way, it's the most read book, outside of the Bible, in the history of the world. You might want to buy one. Whitfield said that the book smelled of lust and prison. If you don't know the story of how the book was written, it was actually written while John Bunyan was in prison. He had a child who was physically challenged, a wife who had no way to make money during this time period and he's in prison. All he had

to do was recant to get out. And he doesn't, but he writes "Pilgrim's Progress" while he's in prison. Just an amazing, amazing man.

Spurgeon says, "I thank Thee that this, which is a necessity of my new life, is also its greatest delight. So, I do at this hour feast on Thee."

John Owen, who is one of my personal favorites and by far my favorite Puritan, says, "O to behold the glory of Christ... Herein would I live; herein would I die; herein would I dwell in my thoughts and affections...until all things below become unto me a dead and deformed thing, no way suitable for affectionate embraces." I love that one.

Brother Lawrence, who was a 16th century monk who wrote a book called "The Practice of the Presence," says in his book, "I have at times had such delicious thoughts on the Lord I am ashamed to mention them." I don't even know what to do with that. I have no idea where to file that, what to do. It kind of makes me feel dirty. The first time I read it, I washed my hands. "I have had such delicious thoughts on the Lord I am ashamed to mention them." Just don't use the word "delicious" and that quote works, but I don't know what to do with that. I don't know what he's talking about still to this day.

So men biblically, they've yearned and longed and been in agony and wanted the things of God with all their might, all their soul, all their resources, all their time, all their passions. And not only them, but look at what's going on in the universe. Go over to Romans 8. This will be our last spot. We're going to pick it up in verse 19. "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope,..." So follow me here. When sin entered the world, it's not just you and me that got broken. The entire universe, every star, every mountain, every planet, everything in the universe gets subjected or hard pressed by God. So the moment sin entered into the world, death and decay entered into the universe and God presses down on and subjects the entire universe to futility and hope. Now let's keep reading. This is very, very, very interesting stuff. Verse 21, "...that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." So then, there is coming a time, new heaven, new earth, where creation is not subjected to decay and death and they know it. And so look at what happens. "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." So follow me here. All of creation has been subjected by God, hard pressed by God, forced into futility by God, and they remember what it was like before the fall and they know there is a time coming where it won't be like that anymore. And so currently, right now, every tree, the mountains, your dog at home, every star is groaning and burning and screaming and longing for Christ to return and remove the weight that they've been subjected to. So let the scientists say what they want about why the wolf howls. I think I know. It remembers. It knows, it knows that there will be a time, and there once was a time where he wasn't going to die. And the trees creak in the wind, the grass that you'll mow and continue to de-weed, the Scriptures say it's groaning, it's longing. It knows something's wrong and they want it restored. And what I love about this text is, who does it say creation is watching? Us. Creation is watching the children of God, waiting to see the revealed sons of God. So what this is saying is that the creation knows that there's eventually coming a day where the last one who's going to believe is going to believe, and then in that moment, Christ is going to rip open the sky and restore. So it's eagerly watching you and me, and they're big fans of evangelism. Your dog is, your dog is a huge fan of evangelism. And so, all of creation is watching us, and every time another human being bends their knee before Christ, creation is like, "Is this it? Is this the one? Is it over? Is it finally removed? Dang it! No! Still waiting, still suppressed, still subjected to futility. Hurry. Hurry." And all of creation groans. And this starts making sense when you look at the brokenness of even the physical world. I mean things like violent winds, hurricanes, tornadoes, shifting of the Earth, it's saying that the Earth is being hard pressed and broken and it's frustrated. You start to understand it a little bit more. It wants to be redeemed, it wants things whole. It's a very interesting

text, isn't it? Look at this next verse. "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

Okay, let's get to the question. My question is not, have men, biblically and historically, longed deeply for the things of God and paid any price to know Him deeply? And my question is not about whether or not creation groans, because the Bible just said it does. The question that haunts me, the question that troubles me, the question that I feel like I have to get to the bottom of is, why don't we? Why are we so content? Why are so few of us bothered? I can't figure out for the life of me why more people aren't terrified by the fact that Jesus said, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord,' and I will say to them, 'Depart from me, accursed, for I do not know you.'" You know, I've been following Him as faithfully as I know how for thirteen years and there are still some times in the middle of the night where I'm like, "Gasp! Uh oh!" and roll out of bed sobbing, "I want to know You." Or how about Hebrews 6 that says you can experience spiritual things and not know Him. Why doesn't it terrify anybody that Jesus says, "For the rich man, it's nearly impossible. It's nearly impossible to get into the kingdom of heaven," when all of us are impossibly rich. And I know some of you are like, "I am not rich." I think we will be running into Liberia once this summer. Why don't you hop on that plane. Do you know that the United States is 4.6% of the world's population, yet 35% of the world's cars are driven on our freeways? We consume 18% of the world's meat and 28% of the world's energy. We're like leeches sucking the life out of the rest of the world. The average house in America has grown 40% in the last 20 years when the amount of children, the size of the family has shrunk 50%. We've got bigger houses and smaller families. What do we need bigger houses for? For our stuff. Because we've already filled up a couple of storage sheds. Honestly, at the end of the day, it's madness that makes me nervous to stand in front of God one day. So why is it that so few people pursue the Lord like this? Why do we seem so unmoved by Him? Why is He so compartmentalized in our life that it's kind of what we do on the weekends or it's just this cognitive belief system of how we operate? Why do so few men and women feel this, walk in this, desire like this, pay the price these people paid? Why is it that we are so unmoved? Because, honestly, I read these guys, I don't know that I'm one of them; I just want to be one real bad.

But honestly, they walk in more freedom than anyone I know. Habakkuk? Talk to me about the freedom that Habakkuk's walking in. He's praising God and full of joy if he's eating steak or he's not eating at all, and he's praising God and enjoying life if business is doing well or if business is doing horrible. And the apostle Paul had to be the most frustrating human being alive to any enemy of the gospel. "Alright, we're going to kill you." "To die is to gain. Let's do this." "Alright, we're going to let you live then." "To live is Christ." "Alright, here's what we're going to do. We're going to pelt you with rocks until you die, beat you with sticks and throw you out into the sea for a couple of days." "Sounds good to me, because these present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the glory. Which ocean are we going to?" And then what? So you finally, not knowing what to do with him, throw him in prison and he just sings worship songs and converts all your guards. I mean, he's the most frustrating human being alive, and I would say then, the most free. Isn't that the most free? The man who says, "My life is not mine. It's in God's hands. May God send blessings or curses, but may I know Him."

And I think for four and a half years, what I've been trying to is that the gospel isn't that if you do this, this happens. The gospel is, in the end, you get God. That's what you get. And listen, He transcends all that we wrestle with. He's the goal. He's the pursuit. It's not, "We do this so that this happens." Because honestly, surely life has taught you that that's not true. Do we have to go over the list? I go over the list once a month with you on purpose. Like Moses, he's faithful to the Lord and he leads this groaning, mumbling, sad group of people through the desert for forty years after God promised him He's going to lead them into the promised land. And then he goes up on the mountain and God parts the clouds and there's the promised land. And God goes, "Isn't it beautiful?" And Moses is like, "It is. Milk, honey, yes." And then God goes, "Okay. Lay down, because I'm going to kill you. You don't get to go in." Now look at me here, because this is a painful reality about life that I think as soon as we're okay with it, then we can live. If I'm Moses, I'm going, "My part is

the desert? My part of the story, how You want to use my life is for me to roam around the desert for forty years with the most self-indulged, complaining pains in the tail that have ever lived on the planet?" "That's your role. I've got one more of them to kill, and then Joshua is leading them into the promised land." I know some of you are like, "I was happy when I came in here. Okay, but what if our role is the desert?"

Here's the kind of thinking that I think has helped me. I come from a long bloodline of wickedness. And because of that, I have issues that I have to constantly submit to the Lord in and submit to the Spirit in and ask the Spirit for continued healing and continued work. And my thought is that I'll probably wrestle with most of those things until I get to go in the ground, but maybe if I'm willing, my son won't have to. So I'm alright with my time in the desert if it means my son gets milk and honey.

Or how about Jeremiah? Every time he does what the Lord tells him, he gets beat up naked and thrown into a ditch. One of my favorites is John the Baptist who sends word to Jesus, "Are You the one or should we expect another?" Jesus quotes Isaiah 60 to him but leaves off the part about prisoners being set free. So He sends word to John the Baptist, "I am the one, and you're going to get your head cut off in a couple of days, in prison."

Do I need to keep going? Because there's plenty. But what did these men get? They got God, and God was enough. He transcends all that we're afraid of. Have you ever thought about how odd it was that the disciples get beat nearly to death and then leave rejoicing? I mean, to get the skin ripped off your back and to leave rejoicing that you were able to suffer for the sake of Jesus? I would say Jesus transcends being beat up with whips. Or Job, who lost everything he had in a moment and falls on the ground and worships? Where are these guys? Why do we seem so far from them? Here's my fear and I end with it. My great fear is that you and I will get swept up in a wave of something that resembles what it means to follow Jesus but, in the end, isn't it at all. It seems like these days preachers and congregations have this dysfunctional relationship. Like "I'm going to stand up here, and preach and you come and affirm my gifting. And if you affirm my gifting, I'll make you feel good about you. And I'll make you feel good and you'll make me feel good and we'll do some good stuff and try to be good people and that will be the church. But in the end, how damning might that be? Alright, so why don't we? And I know that in some of you, this is going to produce some wrestling; in some of you, this is going to produce some fear. Maybe that's the best possible thing that could happen to us. Why don't we? Why are these guys so rare? Why are so many of us right now just indifferent? And I'm bothered by it. Why don't we?"

I have some ideas. That's all they are. I have some ideas, but that's next week. Why don't we? Let's pray, "Father, I know exactly what I want to pray for. I want to pray that You would haunt us, that something that was said this morning or something that we found in the text, I just pray that it would haunt us. As we leave here and head to wherever we're heading, then as we roll into work or school or wherever tomorrow, as we do life this week, I pray that this would haunt us, that this question would gnaw at us and wake us up in the middle of the night, that we could wrestle. I want to want You like this. I want to be frustrated out of my mind if I feel far from You. I want to be like these men, these women who would pay any price just to be near you. We didn't even get into Psalm 27, 'One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD.' And then I pray that You would protect us, protect us from a watered down, weak, impotent spirituality that has some hints of you, but in the end, it's not You at all. I pray not that You would fill seats here but that You would create deep souls. We need help. That cannot be preached into being. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."