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BRIDGES FOR PEACE

Israel Teaching Letter

Vol. # 771008

October 2008



Seeking God

How thirsty are you?

*As the deer panteth for the water
So my soul longeth after Thee
You alone are my hearts desire
And I long to worship Thee*

*You alone are my strength my shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my hearts desire
And I long to worship Thee*

*You re my friend and
You are my brother,
Even though You are a king.
I love You more than any other,
So much more than anything.*

*I want You more than gold or silver,
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy Giver,
And the apple of my eye.*



Seeking God

David was one of the great seekers of God.

I would like to say that he sought the Lord more than all others, but no one can judge a man's heart, so we don't know. However, of all writers of the Scriptures, he may have expressed a seeker's heart better than all others. He was a passionate pursuer of God, and His words vividly illustrate that, painting pictures that help us understand a hunger for God that many believers may not even know is possible to experience.

One of the most popular contemporary worship songs of recent years is "As the Deer," written by Martin Nystrom in 1984. It's based on Psalm 42:1-2. Whose heart doesn't get drawn toward God when singing that song? In a masterful way, the songwriter helps us sense the emotion, I believe, David felt when he wrote the psalm. However, it is not the only time David expressed his longing for God. Anyone who has ever been in love knows it takes more than one letter to express what the depth of that love means. I want us to examine several of David's "love letters," in the hope that they will help generate the same passion for God in us.

But before we do, let's look at some Scriptures, expressing the same kind of zeal for God, which were written long before David's time. After the children of Israel had wandered for 40 years in the wilderness and just before they were to enter the Promised Land, Moses described their future as a nation, a future God no doubt revealed to him supernaturally. He began, "When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown

old in the land...” (Deut. 4:25). Sadly, he goes on to reveal that they would become guilty of idol worship, and the Lord would scatter them among the nations. But, he also shares the good news: *“But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul”* (v. 29).

With a noticeable heartbreak in his voice, Moses later pleads with them, *“O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you...”* (Deut. 6:3a, NASB). And then Moses speaks the words that would become the nation’s daily recital, the *Shema*: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength”* (vv. 4–5). This is what David took to heart. Author Andrew Murray, in his book *The Believer’s New Covenant*, writes, “Wholeheartedness is the secret of joy in salvation...God rejoices over His people to do them good, *with His whole heart and His whole soul*. It needs, on our part, *our whole heart and our whole soul*...With the measure we give, it shall be given to us.”

When God raised up David to be king, the prophet Samuel told Saul, *“...The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart...”* (1 Sam. 13:14). When the Apostle Paul spoke to a crowd on one of his trips and related this story, he expanded on what that meant: *“...a man after My own heart, who will do all My will”* (Acts 13:22b). Though David sinned (2 Sam. 12), like all men do, his passion to love God with all of his heart was so embedded in him that when he sinned, he repented with as much passion.

Everyone who reads Psalm 51 can sense his gut-wrenching sorrow and brokenness over his sin and the fear that he might be separated from the One his soul loved so dearly: *“Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me...For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise”* (vv.11, 16a, 17).

We learn from this that it takes a passionate love for God to repent passionately and sincerely. Yet today, church leaders who have fallen into grave sin, like David’s, often will not submit to church discipline. Oh, that our leaders would be men “after God’s own heart”! Congregations are, of course, also guilty. May we be convicted to repent rather than defend and justify ourselves, but to do that, we must develop a heart like David’s.

How Should We Seek God?

Thirstily—*“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God...”* (Ps. 42:1–2a). He thirsts so much that he says, *“My tears have been my food day and night...”* (v. 3a). This is the language of a desperate man. We know David lived in the wilderness while he was trying to escape King Saul’s pursuit (1 Sam 23). The *“dry and thirsty land where there is no water”* (Ps. 63:1) is a good description of the Judean wilderness just south of Jerusalem. But David found a hideaway there at Ein Gedi (1 Sam 23:29), where, in the deep recesses of the desert, opposite the Dead Sea, there was an abundance of water for him and his men. In the desert? Yes, in the desert!



Wholeheartedness
is the
SECRET
of joy in
SALVATION.



Photo by Jeannette v.d. Merwe

Here at EIN GEDI,
in the deep recesses of the desert,
opposite the Dead Sea, there is
an ABUNDANCE of water.

Today, Ein Gedi is one of Israel's tourist attractions. When my daughter came to visit me, we hiked two trails...in the hottest part of the summer, during the hottest part of the day! I wore a swimsuit with a sleeveless shirt and shorts over it, and my little pack mule (my daughter) carried our water. However, if it had not been for the cool springs, pools, and waterfalls, I would not have made it. Every 10 minutes or so, I would stop and dip my shirt and bandana into the water and put them back on dripping wet. Within minutes, they would be dry again. Another survival tactic was taking the low road through the thickets, where a shallow stream flowed, with our tennis shoes still on. What refreshment to hot, tired feet! And, what an amazing sight to see the contrast between the barren desert terrain above and the tree-lined stream below! At the beginning of the trail, no one would guess water was anywhere around. What an oasis for a discouraged David and his thirsty men!

The water of God's Word and His refreshing presence is always near, but sometimes we have to be really thirsty before we seek it. And, there are a lot of people who don't even know where to go to quench their thirst. In his book *Sermons from the Psalms*, pastor Clovis G. Chappell relates a story that illustrates this:

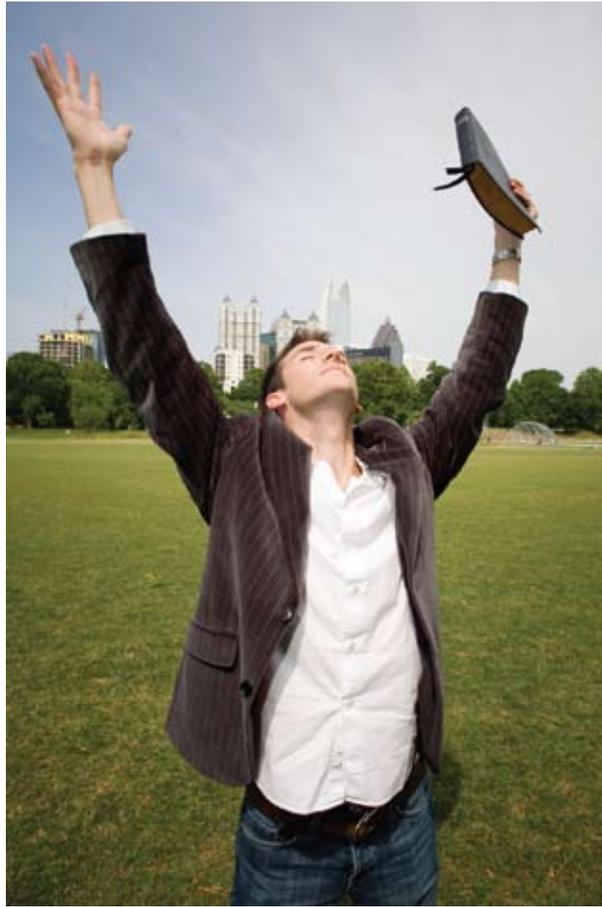
"There is an old story of a derelict ship whose crew was starving for water. At last another ship came into sight. This distressed crew signaled, 'Water, water; we are starving for water.' 'Let down your buckets where you are,' came back the surprising answer. But such an answer seemed to these starving men nothing less than bitter mockery. So they signaled again, 'Water, water; we are starving for water.' Again there came back the same answer, 'Let down your buckets where you are.' At last they complied, not at all sure that anything would come of it, but with a dim hope that possibly they were not being mocked. And something did come of it. They found a supply of fresh water that to them was measureless. For, unknown to themselves, they had been driven into the wide mouth of the Amazon, whose waters freshen the sea for many miles from the shore."

Longingly—In Psalm 63:1, David describes his thirst a little differently: "*My flesh longs for You...*" Other translations use yearns for, faints for, or languishes for. This is the only time the Hebrew word, *kamach*, is used in the Bible. It describes one who has "become pale," possibly close to death. Again, it describes a severe desperation. There have been a few times in my life when I longed for God so much that I actually experienced a physical ache. It's sad that I can only say it was a few times. How severe is our longing for God?

Joyfully—There is another contemporary worship song that calls worshippers to "dance like David danced." Some churches invite worshippers to do just that, while others have a hard time with it. Yet, David danced before the Lord when the ark was brought into Jerusalem. The story in 2 Samuel 6, tells us he even "leaped." There is a dance team in Colorado, where I live when I'm home in America, who dances like that in worship. It is thrilling to watch their joyful abandonment. But there are other ways of showing joy: shouting, clapping, raising your hands, singing, or playing instruments—and all of them are scriptural. In these ways, we are expressing our love for God passionately.

Can we “seek” God with joy? Yes, in fact, the fastest way to get into God’s presence is with praise. However, it doesn’t always start with a *feeling* of joy. We may be down in the dumps, feeling very heavy of heart, but if we discipline ourselves to think differently (Col. 3:2; Phil. 4:8) and begin to praise Him and thank Him, our spirit begins to lift. The book of Psalms helps us do that. When you can’t do anything else, read a psalm!

Diligently—Although this word doesn’t come from one of David’s psalms, it needs to be included here. The writer of Hebrews says that God “...is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6b). Definitions of the Greek word for “diligent” include: to investigate, scrutinize, beg, or crave. In *Standing on the Rock*, author Rebecca Brown comments, “Diligently means work. We must work to get to know God.” As a writer, I relate it to the work required to write a term paper or doctoral thesis. This is not just about a desire that makes you tingle on the inside; it’s about discipline.



God is a
rewarder
of those who
diligently
seek Him.

When Should We Seek God?

Of course, we have access to God anytime of the day, but hear what the psalms say: “*My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD...*” (Ps. 5:3). “*Evening and morning and at noon I will pray and cry aloud...*” (Ps. 55:17a). “*...Early will I seek You...*” (Ps. 63:1). Many Christians struggle to keep a regular prayer time, but observant Jewish people have practiced daily prayer times since Moses’s day.

During the second century AD, after the Second Temple was destroyed, there was a debate between two rabbis as to whether the Jewish people should pray two times a day or three. Traditionally, it was believed that Abraham introduced morning prayer, Isaac afternoon prayer, and Jacob evening prayer. (Some Scriptures that might give clues to this are Genesis 19:27, 24:63, and 32:1–13.) However, synagogue prayer was based on the morning and “evening” (late afternoon) sacrifices (Exod. 29:38–39). Considering the Psalm 55 passage above and the fact that Daniel 6:10 tells us that he prayed three times a day, it was decided that they would pray three times a day.

Paul’s admonition is for Christians to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17), always being in an attitude of prayer. However, based on these Old Testament Scriptures and especially on the fact that—during tabernacle and Temple times—God designed regular, daily worship, we could conclude that His desire is that we seek Him regularly, more than once a day. That takes discipline, but if we desire His company, it should not be a duty, but a joy.



Photo by Jeannette v.d. Merwe

Where Do We Seek God?

The desert—We can seek God anywhere, but where did David especially find him? Psalm 63:1 says, “...*my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.*” Why is it that so many accounts in the Bible happen in the desert or wilderness?

It was in the desert, where Hagar met God (Gen.16:7); where God trained Moses to be a shepherd for 40 years, and Moses first met God in a burning bush (Exod. 3:1–2); where God made Himself known to Israel over and over for 40 years; where He trained David to be king; where Elijah hid from King Ahab and was fed by the ravens (1 Kings 17), where he fled from Jezebel and God met him on the same mountain as Moses (1 Kings 19); where John the Baptist lived and ministered (Matt.3:1); where Yeshua (Jesus) was tested before He began His ministry (Matt. 4:1); and where God most likely revealed an understanding of the New Covenant to Paul (Gal. 1:17). Do you want to be a great man or woman of God? Then, don’t resist the desert seasons in your life. Unfortunately, it often takes a drought in our lives before we get serious about seeking God. Hosea tells us, “...*In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me*” (5:15b).

The sanctuary—“*So I have looked for You in the sanctuary...*” (Ps. 63:2a). “*One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me...*” (Ps. 27:4–5). Moses and Joshua sought Him there too. David’s desire was not just to meet with God twice a day during the times of sacrifice, but to *dwell* there. As believers in Yeshua, that is possible; this is what He meant when He encouraged us to *abide* in Him (John 14:1–11).

Though I have experienced many great worship times with just the Lord and myself in the privacy of my home, or even in my car on a drive home, we are admonished to not forsake “...the assembling of ourselves together...” (Heb.10:25a). Yeshua said, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt.18:20).

David loved the *place* where God dwelt, and we know the tabernacle and Temple were just earthly replicas of God’s throne room in heaven (Heb. 8:5). The worship we will experience in heaven will be so much more than anything we can experience on earth, but in heaven, it won’t be private worship, but corporate. We will be a part of “...a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...” (Rev. 7:9).

God desires that we seek Him as a people, not just as an individual. I think the Jewish people are much better at this than we are. When they confess their sins on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), their prescribed prayers use “we.” They confess and pray as a nation often. This is, no doubt, because God set them aside as a nation. They are following the examples of intercessors like Nehemiah (1:7). In *Basic Judaism*, Milton Steinberg explains, “Man is not himself only, he is a participant in his community. Hence it is not enough that he shall address God in his solitariness; he must turn to Him in his other aspect as well.” God wants us to seek Him *in* community and *as* a community, together, as a body.

Why Should We Seek God?

Remember Hebrews 11:6? “...He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” What are those rewards? In Psalm 63, David says “So I have looked for You...**to see Your power and Your glory.**” (v. 2) and “because Your **lovingkindness** is better than life...” (v. 3). Hosea says, “...break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, **till He comes and rains righteousness on you**” (10:12). Amos encourages us to “seek the LORD and **live...**” (5:6). For a believer, our life depends on it.

Satisfaction—In Psalm 63:5, David summed it all up by saying, “My soul shall be satisfied...” The shepherd-king said the same thing in Psalm 23, “...I shall not want.” Rev. Chappell shares a story to illustrate what it’s like to be satisfied with God:

“That was a rather queer and ugly creature that a mother hen hatched along with her brood of normal and respectable chicks. The egg from which it came had been found on the side of a rugged mountain. He seemingly did his best to satisfy himself with the tame, unexciting life of the barnyard. But somehow it did not work. His crooked beak was out of place there, and his great wings seemed utterly useless. So the poor, awkward thing looked on his drab world with lackluster eyes. He did not fit in and was very evidently not at home. But one day he heard a wild scream above him. He looked up, and his eyes kindled. He saw a great bird like himself, an eagle. Then he realized what he had been thirsting for all the while. Therefore he spread his burnished brown wings and was away to the freedom of his larger world. He was made for the cloudland and for the crags of the mountains. Therefore he could not be satisfied in the barn yard. No more can we be satisfied with less than God. This is true whether we ever recognize it or not.”

Everything We Need—In Yeshua’s Sermon on the Mount, He told us, “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’...But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:31, 33). As Christians, we tend to get our seeking priorities out of order. We put our careers and material needs first, thinking we

We were
made for the
CLOUDLAND
and for the
crags of the
mountains.



are responsible for them, and then, if we have time, we seek God. Yeshua is saying if we seek Him first, *He* will provide all we need. He wants us to seek Him for which career we should choose, where He wants us to live, or where He wants us to go to school. If we do, He is sure to take care of all our needs.

How Much of God Do We Want?

Rebecca Brown challenges readers with some hard questions: “How much of God do you want? Do you want just enough to be sure that you will get to heaven when you die, but not enough to inconvenience you or make you uncomfortable?...just how much are you willing for your relationship with God to interfere with your personal private life, goals and dreams? Are you willing for God to do things in your life that you do not want?”

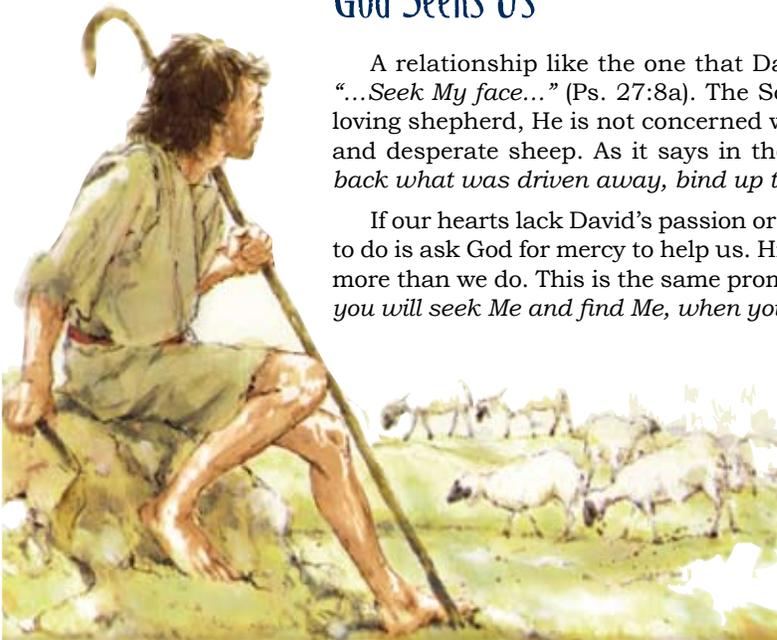
Desiring more of God has a cost. Are we thirsty enough to pay the price? Sadly, Rebecca Brown remarks that “it is the fear of this cost that stops many from progressing.” As Christians, we must be willing to say, as Yeshua did in the Scriptures, “...*I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me*” (John 5:30b).

God Seeks Us

A relationship like the one that David sought begins with God. It is God who invites us: “...*Seek My face...*” (Ps. 27:8a). The Scriptures teach us that God is a diligent seeker. Like a loving shepherd, He is not concerned with numbers but will leave the flock to find the one lost and desperate sheep. As it says in the book of Ezekiel: “*I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick...*” (34:16a).

If our hearts lack David’s passion or if we lack the discipline it takes to “progress,” all we have to do is ask God for mercy to help us. His desire is *for* us. He wants a deeper relationship with us more than we do. This is the same promise that God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah: “*And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart*” (29:13).

By Charleeda Sprinkle
Assistant Editor



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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted. Some emphasis has been added.

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding “yes”! It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. “*For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*” (Isaiah 2:3).

