

Longing for God

Psalms 23; 27; 42; 61; 84



If you're reading all of Psalms, also read Psalm 43 this week. Remember to mark them off your reading list at the back of the book.

Review

What does it mean that God is a refuge and a fortress?

MEMORIZE the TRUTH!

My soul longs,
yes, faints for the
courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh
sing for joy to the
living God.

Psalm 84:2

Intro

Longing may not be a word you use very often. But have you ever wanted something so badly you could hardly stand it? Maybe you couldn't even stop thinking about it! That's what *longing* is.

The writers of these psalms longed for God. They wanted to know Him and be close to Him. Whether we know what it's like to long for God or haven't ever thought about it, these psalms can inspire our own desire for God.

Day 1 Psalm 23—The Good Shepherd

Say God's truth for the week: Psalm 84:2. Act this verse out for a friend or someone in your family (tell them it's your memory verse from your Bible study this week). See if they can guess what the verse is about based on what you act out for them.

Psalm 23 is one of the best-known and most quoted psalms. David grew up as a shepherd who tended his father's sheep. He used that imagery to describe God as a shepherd who lovingly cares for His sheep—His people. Like David, we can learn to see all the ways God takes care of us.

1. Draw or write how David saw God providing for him and protecting him.

Providing

Protecting

2. Imagine someone you are afraid of. Now picture sitting at an amazing table filled with your favorite food and eating it in front of that person without being afraid. What might God have been trying to show David by preparing a table (or feast) where He did?
3. David talked about God's goodness and loving mercy.
 - a. What might it look like for goodness and mercy to follow someone?
 - b. Do you believe that God's goodness and loving mercy will follow you?
Yes No
 - c. If so, how does that affect how you think about your life? If not, how do you think believing that could affect the way you look at life?
4. Read John 10:11-15.
 - a. What did Jesus call Himself?
 - b. What kind of relationship does Jesus have with His sheep, and what does He do for them?
5. Do you long for God to do any of the things described in Psalm 23 in your life? If so, what?

Day 2 Psalm 27—Waiting on the Lord

Unpack God's truth for the week: Psalm 84:2.

What did David's soul long for? _____

What did his heart and soul do? _____

What word did David use to describe God? _____

What do all of these things tell you about David's relationship with God?

How do you feel about waiting? When David was writing this psalm, he was waiting for God to give him what he desired. He longed for God to hide and protect him. But even more than that, he wanted to be in God's presence. Still, David knew he had to wait for God to provide these things in His timing. He trusted that God would use the waiting for his good.

6. From verses 2-3 and 12, what was David facing as he wrote this psalm?

7. From verse 4, what did David ask God for, and why?

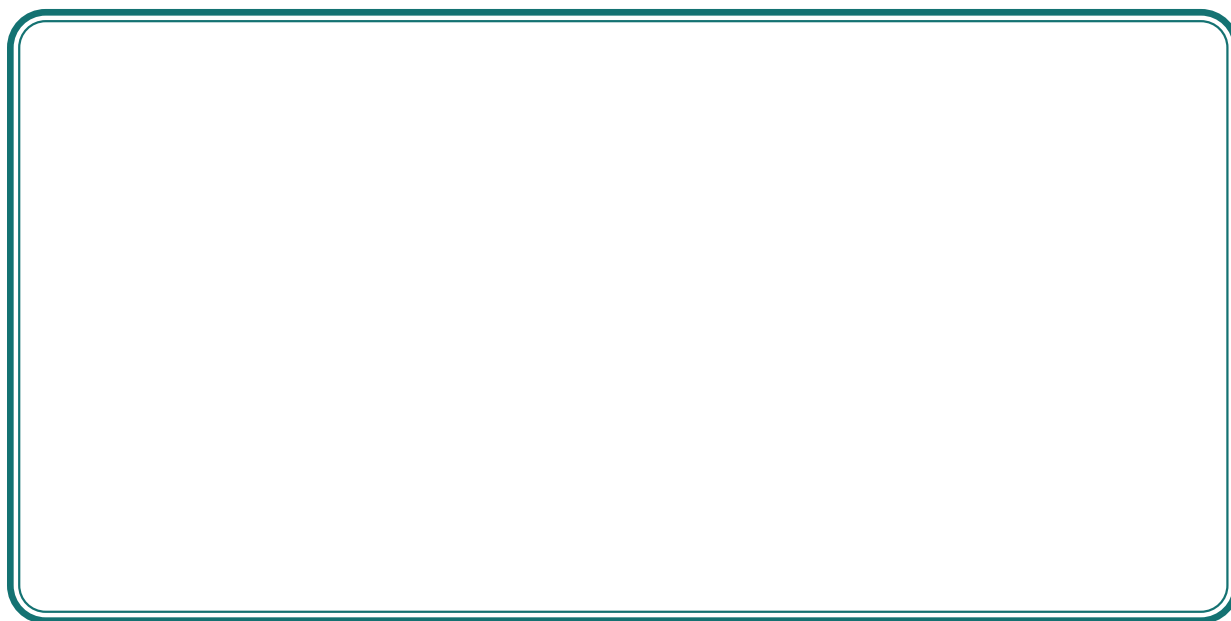
8. In verse 14, David talked about waiting for the Lord. From your experience, why does waiting require us to be strong and courageous, as the verse says?

9. Read Isaiah 40:31 below.

“But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

a. Rewrite this verse in your own words.

b. What does it promise to those who wait on God? Draw or write your answer in the box.





LEARN the TRUTH!

Despite his confidence in the Lord, David pleaded with God not to abandon him. Is there any way in which you feel forsaken by God right now? If so, use David's prayer in Psalm 27:9-10 to talk to God about it. Or turn it into a prayer for someone else you know or have heard about who feels forsaken.

Day 3 Psalm 42—A Psalmist Talks to Himself

Write God's truth for the week: Psalm 84:2. Write the first half with your nondominant hand and the second half with your dominant hand.

Imagine the earth opening up and swallowing a guy. It really happened—because that guy, Korah, rebelled against God (see Numbers 16). Despite Korah's sad ending, many generations later, King David gave Korah's descendants the honor of leading worship. Eleven psalms are attributed to the sons of Korah, including Psalms 42 and 84. In this week's lesson, the writer of Psalm 42 knew that just being in God's presence would change his perspective and encourage his heart, so he longed to get as close to God as he could.

10. The psalmist expressed his longing for God in verses 1-2. Maybe you've not been around many panting deer, so how would you phrase the writer's longing using a more familiar example? Be creative!
11. Verses 9-10 tell us what was happening as this psalm was written.
 - a. Read verse 10 again. What were people saying to taunt the writer?
 - b. How did it make him feel?
12. In his discouragement, the psalmist talked to himself about what was true (see verses 5 and 11; also see Psalm 43:5).
 - a. Why did he need encouragement?

b. What did he tell himself to do, and why?

c. How does what the psalmist said compare to what you usually do when you're discouraged or sad?

Day 4 Psalm 61—Dwelling Where God Dwells

Exercise God's truth for the week: Psalm 84:2. Practice singing or shouting for joy to the Lord. Sing about who He is to you and what He has done, or what you are thankful to Him for. It might feel a little awkward at first, but remember how much the Lord loves it when you sing to and about Him.

What would it be like to be pushed out of your home and have nowhere to go? David knew what that was like. During his life, he had been driven from his home by Saul (the man who was king before he was) and later by Absalom (his own son). He wanted God to lead him to safety, but he knew he would be most safe where God dwelt. If you feel afraid and overwhelmed like David did, meditating on the words of this psalm can assure you that God is strong and can protect you. He hears your pleas.

13. David knew God is all-knowing, but in verse 1, David pleaded with God to listen to him. Why do you think he might have done this?

14. What do you notice David longing for in this psalm?



BEHIND the SCENES

In the Old Testament, people used words like *tabernacle*, *tent*, *temple*, *sanctuary*, *house*, *courts*, and *dwelling place* to refer to the place where God met with them. King Solomon, David's son, eventually built the temple—a physical building—in Jerusalem. People from all over Israel came to Jerusalem to worship and be in God's presence.

15. Someone longing for God today probably wouldn't say "let me dwell in your tent forever." If this was your prayer, how might you say it to God?

Day 5 Psalm 84—Longing to Meet with God

Remember God's truth for the week: Psalm 84:2. Fill in the blanks to complete the verse. Try to do it without looking back. Check your work when you're finished.

My _____ longs, yes, faints for _____; my _____ and flesh
_____ for _____ to the _____.

A *pilgrimage* is a journey for a spiritual purpose. Many of the psalms are songs of pilgrimage—songs people sang as they traveled to Jerusalem to worship God. Psalm 84 is one of these. In the Old Testament, the Israelites would make long, difficult journeys to Jerusalem to be near God. They traveled mostly by foot on dangerous roads, often threatened by bandits and wild animals, so they could meet with Him. That's the background of Psalm 84, in which the writer couldn't wait to see God "in Zion" (verse 7), or Jerusalem.



BEHIND the SCENES

The name *Zion* refers to a "lifted up" place or a mountain. In the Old Testament, it can stand for a specific hill in Jerusalem, the city of Jerusalem itself, or the dwelling place of God.

16. How intensely did this writer want to be with God? Mark your answer on the line below.



17. Think about where you would place yourself on this line. How is your longing for God similar to or different from the writer's?

18. Think about where you would place yourself on this line. How is your longing for God similar to or different from the writer's?

19. In verse 10, the writer said he would rather spend one day with God than a thousand days somewhere else. Then he gave his reason for this in verse 11.

a. From verse 11, draw what the writer compared God to.



b. What does God promise to those who walk rightly with Him?

20. If you can, go on a little “pilgrimage”—a walk near your home thinking about God. Take or draw pictures of what you saw that reminded you what you’ve learned about God this week.



APPLY the TRUTH!

Do you know someone who seems to be actively seeking after God? Find a time to ask them about that. Why do they seek after God? How do they do it? What are the rewards they've seen from pursuing God? (You can also ask some of your own questions.)

Notes & Doodles

Longing for God

Psalms 23; 27; 42; 61; 84

Some things we need, like food and water. Some things we want, like our own way, a good grade, or a phone. But some things we *long for*: being known and understood, answers to life's questions, hope. *Longing* comes from the deepest desires of our hearts.

In this week's psalms, the writers longed for God—to be in His presence. Their words help us think about the kind of relationship we have with God and what it could be.

Longing for What God Provides

Longing often arises from a need. Something in life that is missing or not right, and we want it to change. For the psalmists, that need was often protection. David walked through one scary situation after another and longed for the sheltering protection of the Lord (see 61:4)—and God met this need for safety.

Even when David walked through darkness, he had all that he needed because God walked closely with him. God did more than just protect David. He prepared a feast for him in the midst of his enemies. David could relax and enjoy God's provision because he knew God was his protector.



Think about . . .

how the Bible often portrays God as a shepherd and His followers as sheep. Sheep are vulnerable creatures. They don't make it long on their own. Their shepherd takes care of them and knows what's best for them. If one gets lost, he goes after it. He provides for all their needs. He comforts

them when they're anxious. Jesus, the greatest shepherd of all, even gave up His life to care for His sheep (see John 10:15).

Longing for God Himself

The psalmists longed for God's protection. They longed for Him not to reject them, forsake them, or turn away from them (see 27:9). But they also longed for God Himself, just to be close to Him and enjoy Him.



Gianacarlo Pellegrini's icon of Christ as the Good Shepherd is in Chiesa di San Pietro church in Bologna, Italy. An icon is a type of religious art designed to teach people about God. Every element of an icon means something. What draws your interest in this picture?

David said that if he could seek after just one thing, it would be to live in God's house forever (see 27:4). He wanted to spend his time thinking about God and paying attention to His beauty and goodness. He wanted God to show him how to walk along the right path. David's number-one goal was knowing God and His ways.

If you have a relationship with Jesus, God has made His home in you. You can meet with Him right now.

This is a good example for us. We may want God to do good things for us or fix the trouble we're in. We may want Him to take away our guilt or bless us. The Bible is filled with verses that tell us how much He loves doing these things for His people. But there's a difference between wanting God to do stuff for us and longing for God Himself.

Longing and Waiting

Longing, as we see in these psalms, goes hand in hand with waiting. It also carries with it some uncertainty. We don't usually long for something we know that we'll get tomorrow.

Psalms 27:13 shows David's confidence that he would see the Lord's goodness "in the land of the living." He believed he would see God's goodness in this life, even though this life is often hard. But he also knew that would require waiting. This psalm encourages us to "wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD" (27:14, NLT).



Think about . . .

waiting on God. We know that "the LORD is good to those who wait for him"

(Lamentations 3:25). But we generally don't like to wait. We want what we want now. Waiting feels like wasting time. But waiting on God is the opposite. When we wait on God, we're building our trust in Him. We're learning how to persevere. We're becoming more aware of His presence. This isn't bored waiting. It's "I-can't-wait-to-see-how-God-answers" waiting.

Getting Close to God Then and Now

Remember that for the writers in the Old Testament, getting close to God involved going to a physical place, God's dwelling place on earth. So when they longed to be in God's courts or house, what they were saying was, "God, I want to be as close to you as I can get!"

We don't have a temple today, so how do we get close to God? People in Old Testament times would have been amazed at the answer to that question. Today, God gives His Spirit to every individual who puts their trust in His Son Jesus. God has come to dwell with us!

Gathering with others for worship is still essential. But we don't have to trek to a temple to meet with God. We can also draw near to God in living rooms, bedrooms, hiking trails, or even while brushing our teeth! If you have a relationship with Jesus, God has made His home in you. You can meet with Him right where you are.

But What If I Don't Long for God?

In these psalms, souls are panting and fainting for God, and that may not be you right now. Maybe you wonder why you don't feel the way that the psalmists did. Longing for God doesn't look the same for every person. People may not always feel a longing for God.

At the same time, hunger is a vital sign of life. If we stop hungering for food completely—and

therefore stop eating—we'll die. The same is true of our hungering for God. If we find ourselves with no longing for God at all, it's a good time to ask why. A one-time commitment to God is not enough to sustain us for a lifetime.

Just like the person who stops hungering for food, the person who does not hunger for God needs to learn ways to stimulate their appetite. One of the best ways to do this is by taking tiny “bites” of His goodness. Reading parts of Scripture that have been meaningful to you in the past. Having coffee with a friend who has a close walk with Jesus. Finding a new worship song to sing along with. Setting aside time to spend alone with God. These are all ways you could “tease your appetite” into action again. And as you feed your relationship with Him, your longing for Him will grow.



Think about . . .

how longing grows. Maybe you wish you longed for God, but you just don't feel it. Maybe you try to live in a way that pleases Him, Maybe you read your Bible, pray,

and go to church, but it feels more like something you have to do than want to do. God loves your faithfulness and perseverance! Whether you're feeling it or not, you are growing your relationship with Him. If you're sad or discouraged that you don't long for God, that itself is a sign of longing. Keep on pursuing Him. He will answer (see James 4:8).

In the Old Testament, God made a promise to His people who had wandered away from Him. Their lives had become hopeless as a result. But God told them, “You will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:12-13, NIV).

If you've wandered from God and feel distant from Him, take heart. God has cleared the way for you to come to Him. If you're trying hard to do the things that please Him but still feel distant from Him, be encouraged and remember that God will answer your prayer to grow in longing for Him. He longs to be close to you.



PERSONALIZE the TRUTH!

Longing for God may not be something you've thought about much before, but now that you've studied it, do you long for God? What does that look like for you? If you don't long for God, why is that? Is there something about your relationship with Him that you'd like to change? Talk to Him about those questions, and seek out someone who can help you process them if that would be helpful.



Notes & Doodles