

Being near God

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Date: 25 November 2018

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[0 : 0 0] just before we turn back to God's word we'll just say a short word of prayer dear heavenly father Lord we pray Lord that this very day that we would indeed abide with you we pray that you would bless us as we come closer to your word Lord we thank you for this psalm that we're going to look into just now and pray Lord that it would speak to us we pray that you will give me the words to say Lord and that it will be met with hearing ears we pray Lord that your word would continue to be shared amongst this community Lord in these islands we pray that your word would continue to be cherished as it is Lord we thank you for such opportunities where we can indeed open your word we pray that you will give us all hearing ears this very day Lord that we'll be able to hear of you in this word Lord we pray that you would speak to us speak to us each at our own need wherever we are Lord we pray that you would indeed speak to us in that word go before us now Lord and forgive us for all of our sins in Christ's name we pray Amen now just before we start looking into

Psalm 84 if you could maybe just turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 2 sorry Genesis chapter 3 just very briefly I've not put it up on the screen but I'll just read it out anyway so Genesis chapter 3 we're just going to read the first 10 verses Genesis chapter 3 now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made he said to the woman did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden and the woman said to the serpent we may eat of the fruit of the tree in the garden the trees in the garden but God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden neither shall you touch it lest you die but the serpent said to the woman you will not surely die for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil so when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise she took of its fruit and ate and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths and they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord the Lord God among the trees of the garden but the Lord God called to the man and said to him where are you and he said

I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself so if we now go back to well you can turn your Bibles back to Psalm 84 but we're going to have a wee discussion a little bit about Genesis chapter 3 there so before we go to that I'm just going to expound a little bit upon the first 10 verses of chapter 3 so here we see Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden dwelling with God mankind at the creation dwelt directly with God and had a close loving friendship with him at the time of creation we are in fact told as we read there in chapter 3 of Genesis that Adam and Eve were well acquainted with being in direct fellowship with God he walked with them in the cool of the day they were familiar with the sound of God walking in the garden showing us that we were indeed created to be in that close relationship with our perfect creator the nearness that we had to God in the beginning was however quickly spoiled when Adam and Eve disobeyed God the glorious fellowship that they enjoyed with the creator ceased we were created to be in a relationship with him yet now as we saw with Adam and Eve we hide and try to avoid him as well you might feel that the fall of man was

Adam and Eve's fault I know when I was younger I used to think why am I being punished for something that Adam and Eve did but if we're honest and we do look inwardly we will see ourselves in both Adam and Eve and the sin that they committed now I know this is the second week that an HR department's been mentioned but I couldn't resist the opportunity so what I find sometimes when I walk around the hospital there are certain members of staff or certain departments that they don't like speaking to HR because a lot of the times when you deal with HR it's for a bad reason and a lot of the times especially if I've been involved in a case that shows someone else's behaviour in a bad light they'll often do their best to try and avoid you whether it's eye contact or they'll maybe jump into a room as you're walking past so I know what it's like when people try to avoid you and I know some of you will probably feel the same as well I'll not go into any detail so we know what that's like but it's an earth-falling nature to avoid and to hide it's what we do and we as people run from God and hide ourselves from him on a regular if not constant basis and we see in Genesis here that after sinning both Adam and Eve hid themselves from God if you look at verse 8

God was walking with them in the cool of the day and was looking for Adam yet after hearing the familiar sound of God being near him he was afraid and was found hiding from God his sin and indeed our sin has destroyed our very purpose of enjoying and treasuring the perfect nearness of God thankfully though our almighty God is perfectly faithful to us and he doesn't give up on us at that point Christianity is not about man searching for God it's God searching for man he's persistent in his pursuit of us in order to have that sweet fellowship with him again regardless of our sin if we then skip forward in our minds you don't need to go in your Bibles if we skip forward in our minds a little bit further in the Old Testament to the point where Egypt was redeemed and God at that time designed himself a tent to dwell with his people or the tabernacle so we skip forward a little bit they built this tent or tabernacle amongst them as a reminder that God is indeed relentless in his desire to be near and to dwell with them he wants to dwell with them and he wants to dwell with you even when we in our sinful ways try to run and hide from him he doesn't sit back and watch from a distance no he opts to set up a dwelling place in the middle of his people in order that he can be near them now I know what you're thinking you're desperate to get to Psalm 84 but bear with me we'll get there in a wee second we'll just get one more kind of stop as we move forward if we now cast our minds a little bit further on in the story of the Old Testament we then come to the point where

[6 : 37] Israel entered into the promised land and we see that the tent the tabernacle that was previously there is now exchanged from a permanent and fixed dwelling in the temple God created a place where he could permanently be near to his people and they also with him it was believed that Psalm 84 was written in the temple era when God had that fixed place to dwell in and as you can tell from the psalmist as they write here there's a deep longing to be near God in that fixed place that he has found so looking back to Adam and Eve when we were created and when they were created it was to enjoy sweet relationship with God yet our go-to response is to hide and to avoid being near him at all costs because of the sins in our lives it's not in our nature to draw near to God and it's something that we need to be mindful of so for the service this morning I've done what most people do and got a few points so there's three points that I've picked it's actually quite helpful because the psalm is really broken into three separate sections you can see there they're separated by the word *selah* which I believe means just kind of pause for contemplation so it is quite a natural split in the psalm so the first of these points I'm going to look at is longing to be near God the second one that we'll explore is journeying to be near God and finally the third point will be treasure being near God so just looking at the first section longing to be near God

I'll read verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 84 how lovely is your dwelling place O Lord of hosts my soul longs yes faints for the courts of the Lord my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God I would ask have you ever been in a situation where you're craving or desiring something so much that it becomes a physical feeling as well as an emotional one if you've ever been away from home and I know a lot of people will have gone away from home in their past or are preparing to go away from home you might have felt homesick and it's not just a homesick where you would like to be back home but there's a genuine feeling in your stomach that you miss being from the place of home so that's the strength of this word here it's an intense word that we have here when he talks about he longs yes faints for the courts of the Lord one of the commentators uses they kind of elaborate a little bit on the word longs and they say that the word the meaning of it is a word used of the bereft parent crying out for the children whom she has lost so it shows you that there's a genuine feeling in that word longing he doesn't just want to be near God he longing to be near God there's a physical and emotional feeling attached to that some translation

I think either the NIV or the authorised version has the word long changed to yearns so my soul yearns so there is an intensity to that feeling it's not just a something that you would like to do or something that you're in the mood for it's a strong intense longing to be near to God so he longs to be with God so much as we move a little bit further down the psalm he longs to be with God so much that he even envies the birds that are actually nesting in the temple we could look at verse 3 even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow and nest for herself where she may lay her young at your altars O Lord of hosts my King and my God the psalmist here is saying that he even wished to be like one of the birds that were always near to God in the temple he wishes he was so near to God in his dwelling place because of what we read in verse 4 and it says blessed are those who dwell in your house he wants to be blessed he wants to be blessed and in order to do that he needs to actually be near to God he longs so much to be with God that he would rather be a nesting bird in the corner of the temple just in order that he is near to his God do you long to be near to God do you have that physical feeling in your body that cries out to be near to God today

I think if we're honest more often than not we would probably say no to those questions we don't long to be with God as we should do we let other things in our lives come in and distract us from the nearness of God whether that's prioritising our pursuits of money letting our hobbies control our lives or forever turning to our phones TVs or computers that consume our lives these things for example hobbies are gifts from God but when we fail to see God in them they quickly become deadly substitutes for God so we need to be mindful of that we are so often distracted that a physical or painful longing for God is not something that we are familiar with as the psalmist is the psalmist longs to be with God more than he longs for anything else in the world which is quite a challenge to us all moving on just to verse 5 to 8 I'll just read them just now blessed are those whose strength is in you and whose heart are the highways to Zion as they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs the early rain also covers it with pools they go from strength to strength each one appears before God in Zion

O Lord God of hosts hear my prayer give ear O God of Jacob so we see a shift here moving from longing to be near God to journeying to be near God and if we focus again on verse 5 blessed are those whose strength is in you whose heart are the highways to Zion now Zion is the city of God where God had made his fixed dwelling amongst his people so if we could focus on that verse in particular for just now the psalmist is saying that blessed are those whose heart are the highways to Zion now I want us to think this is maybe something for myself anyway I know how easy it is for us to get directions whether it's on our phones we go to Google Maps we get sat-navs in the cars we can even text or phone people if we need directions somewhere so we're not very well equipped with having to actually find our way or being lost and to kind of put a bit of background to that when I was I was going to Aberdeen at the end of September for a training course and I had to take the car no idea about

[12 : 34] Aberdeen I've never really driven to Aberdeen at all so I would rely solely on my sat-nav to take me there punched in the hotel that I was going to stay in and it took me exactly to where I was looking to go had I not had that sat-nav then I would have struggled along the road and would likely have become lost along the way if however that training course was staying Glasgow I wouldn't have required help with my sat-nav I was born and brought up in Glasgow and would have had no problem getting myself around the city to see where I had to go when you know a place by heart you don't need directions in the way to go when we know that place by heart we don't need the directions in the way to go those that have the Lord in their heart know the way to him as they regularly come to him in worship and in praise the way to God is emblazoned on the Christian's heart and they know the way and they know that he will supply their needs to them on that journey as we saw at the beginning of verse 5 blessed are those whose strength is in you so God's strength is in them on that journey he will provide for you on the journey and he will take you to your destination so looking at verses 6 to 7 as they go through the valley of Baker they make it a place of springs the early rain also covers it with pools they go from strength to strength each one appears before God in Zion so we see that they go through the valley of Baker here and they make it a place of springs now the exact location of the valley of Baker is unknown however one of the commentators I was looking into said the word Baker actually means weeping so weeping as they move through the valley of weeping it turns fertile as they near their God what we are told here by the psalmist is that those who trust in God will find refreshment in a dry and desolate place what's even more amazing in these two verses is what we see in verse 7 the second part of verse 7 so they go from strength to strength each one appears before God in Zion not only does God supply their meat with refreshment but each each one appears before God we don't hear of anyone being left behind or not surviving the journey to be near God each one appears before God those of us that trust in the

Lord will find he supplies their need on the journey but he also makes their journey a successful one so how are you doing on the journey today I ask myself the same question how am I doing on the journey today maybe you find yourself in the valley of Baker you find yourself in a dry and desolate place but you should be encouraged by the words that we see here in verse 7 each one appears before God in Zion these words are a sure promise for your encouragement and my encouragement this morning even in great hardship God will provide refreshment and strength to those who put their trust in him the journey is not a nice straight tarmac road it's full of twists and turns and many challenges and valleys that we will go down but we will always come out of them if we trust in God God will provide for you at the point of your need each and every one of us so we can be assured that we will make it successfully to our journey's end you might feel weak and weary on your journey today you might feel you're struggling you're in a place where you're really finding it hard to get out of the valley but I would say to keep on keep trusting in him and make him your strength because the promise that we have there in verse 7 each one appears before God there's no doubt there's no question mark around that it's a definitive and that's what will be the outcome so we can then move on to the third point where we see a shift from journeying to be near God to treasure being near

God and I'll just read verses 9 to the end behold our shield O God look on the face of your anointed for a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in tents of wickedness for the Lord God is a sun and shield the Lord bestows favour and honour no good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly O Lord of hosts blessed is the one who trusts in you so we see a shift there from journeying to be near God to actually treasuring being near to God what a wonderfully challenging comparison we have here in these verses the psalmist here would rather have one day in the courts of the Lord than to live a thousand days anywhere else how can that be true you probably ask yourself you might think that the psalmist obviously hasn't been to Harris because one day here you would want more than one day here but in all seriousness the important that this psalmist places on this is nothing to do with length of life he would rather stay one day than a thousand days anywhere else he doesn't wish for an extension to life he doesn't want as many days elsewhere he would want one day in the presence of the Lord than to be a thousand anywhere else indeed our God is so unimaginably gracious and glorious we must ask the question why do we run why do we try to avoid being near to God why do we distract ourselves with earthly and unsatisfying things why do we choose almost everything else in our lives before we draw near to God what we're saying when we do that is if I spend time with God over here then I'm going to miss out on a lot of things over here that I would like to do a lot of good things over here if I go this way and spend some time with

God so a very sinful nature means that we so often choose those one thousand days of running than the one day dwelling with God the Samus doesn't stop there though with the comparison if we look at the rest of verse 10 I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness he would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness it's far better for him to be on the edge of God's house rather than be in the heart and dwell in the middle of the tents of wickedness and one of the things I notice in my study with the wording here is a doorkeeper he's at the door of a permanent place where God dwells yet the wickedness which he refers to here in verse 10 is at the centre of the tents of wickedness the house of God is permanent the tents of wickedness are so desperately temporary and fragile looking at verse 10 as a whole I want to ask you and ask myself whether or not we are indeed drawing near to God do we choose the tents of wickedness or do we choose to even be on the edges of where God dwells in order to be near to him so it's quite a challenging question that we must ask ourselves it's not to say that if you've got a hobby you never do it but if it replaces your time with

God then it becomes a problem so are you choosing to be near him or are you opting for the temporary pleasures in the tents of wickedness the study bible that I've got here actually puts it quite perfectly it said wickedness offers no reward that can even remotely compare to the joy and pleasure of God's house I'll just say that one again wickedness offers no reward that can even remotely compare to the joy and pleasure of God's house remember as the psalmist has said so wonderfully here it's better to be in the presence of the living God than to be anywhere else no matter what good you see in this world it's better to be with God for one day than anywhere else for a thousand days Matthew Henry says it quite nicely he says it's better to serve God in solitude than serving sin with the multitude you might be listening to this message this morning thinking that this sounds maybe too onerous or it doesn't sound enjoyable to be drawing near to God you might wish to actually remain in the thousand days in the tents of wickedness doing what you think is good you don't want to miss out for example you think that if I do that then I'm going to miss out on all these good things so if that is yourself

[20 : 19] I want you to be encouraged by what we actually read in verse 11 now for the Lord God is a sun and shield the Lord bestows favour and honour no good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly no good thing does he withhold there is no missing out on anything when you draw near to God you will receive rich blessing and strength if you long to be near God and indeed are journeying to be near to God we should treasure being near God knowing that he will ensure no good thing is withheld from us Sam ends in verse 12 with a final blessing blessed is the one who trusts in you so O Lord of hosts blessed is the one who trusts in you so that's the question do you want to receive that blessing and goodness if so then it's not found in the tents of wickedness but it's found only in the house of God where he is dwelling so you may ask the question what now where do we go from here and the answer is simply to the cross the wonderful psalm that we have here finds this absolute fulfilment in Jesus

Christ when I was studying into this I found at least two ways there's probably many more but I found at least two ways in which Jesus fulfills this psalm so I'll briefly touch on these just now the three points I used earlier on so longing to be near God journeying to be near God and treasure being near God were perfectly carried out by Jesus he lived out the very heart of this psalm so perfectly and far better than you and I ever will now if you've got your bibles there could you maybe just move forward to Luke chapter 2 if you don't mind we're going to read quite a well known story about how Jesus actually fulfills this Luke chapter 2 and we'll read from verse 41 to 46 so Luke chapter 2 verse 41 now his parents that's Jesus parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover and when he was 12 years old they went up according to custom and when the feast was ended as they were returning the boy

Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem his parents did not know it but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances and they did not find him they returned to Jerusalem searching again after three days they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers listening to them and asking them questions so the beginning of verse 46 there is an important one here after three days they found him in the temple so this wasn't the work of a rebellious young 12 year old if I look at my own life it probably would have been this isn't the work of a young rebellious Jesus it was Jesus fulfilling this Psalm 84 perfectly by longing to be near God he longed to be near God so much that what was going on in his life coming to the Passover and turning home completely lost his mind and he went straight into the temple in order to be with God he was longing to be near God he probably felt that physical longing that we were talking about earlier he wished to dwell in the place of his father

Jesus is so often found in the New Testament disappearing away in order that he can be near God in prayer with a perfect commitment Jesus was truly devoted to drawing near to God and I suppose we shouldn't wallow in our own failing to do so because his perfect righteousness was exchanged for our sin his perfect longing to be near God was exchanged for our pitiful efforts the fulfillment of this psalm is found in Jesus in his flawless devotion on our behalf the second way that I found in which Jesus fulfills this psalm is that he now is the place that we go to be near God the dwelling place that we ought to long for and rather spend one day in than a thousand days elsewhere now is Jesus Christ the earthly tents and buildings where God once dwelt are now no longer required this is seen in Matthew chapter 27 you don't need to go I'll just read it Matthew chapter 27 sorry and verse 51 this is just after Jesus died on the cross when it was evening there came a oh no that's not verse 51 and behold the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom and the earth shook and the rocks were split so shortly after

Christ was crucified the temple curtain was torn in two which rendered the temple that they had obsolete there was no longer need for the fixed dwelling on earth in the temple we no longer have a need for that temple on earth if we wish to draw near to God now we do so through Jesus he is the new meeting place in order to dwell with God so we should be encouraged that when we long to be near God we have a perfect saviour to go to who when we have faith in him will allow us to draw near to God whether you're fulfilling this psalm or not whether you're a Christian this morning or not we can confidently draw near to God because in Christ we are made fit to do so we should all look inwardly and pray that we are each longing to be near God journeying to be near God and that we indeed treasure being near God so in closing I want to just cast our minds back to Genesis we were each created to be in perfect relationship with God and now when we look to the cross in Calvary we can have that relationship once again because the sin that one separated us from God has been dealt with it's now no longer an issue like the bird in the temple we have found a home in Jesus a nest for ourselves where we may live in the presence of God and it's my prayer that each one of you here today will long to be near God that you will journey to be near God and that you will treasure being near God knowing that each one of you will make it to your journey's end without fail

[26 : 25] Amen and may the Lord bless those very short thoughts to us just now we'll conclude our worship together by singing Mission Praise 331 Mission Praise 331 In heavenly love abiding no change my heart shall fear and safe is such confiding for nothing changes here the storm may roar without me my heart may low be laid but God is round about me and can I be dismayed wherever he may guide me no one shall turn me back my shepherd is beside me and nothing can I lack his wisdom ever walketh his sight is never dim he knows the way he taketh and I will walk with him green pastures are before me which yet I have not seen bright skies will soon be o'er me where the dark clouds have been my hope I cannot measure my path to life is free and these are the important two lines my saviour is my treasure and he will walk with me he will walk with you it's not a question mark around that so we'll sing

Bishop Praise 331 and we'll stand to sing