

Opening

- Informal Sharing (Chit Chat)
- Welcome and sharing of why we are here. Such as;
 - Companions – friends with whom we break bread – sharing our journey
 - Hold one another accountable to the Rule of Life
 - Pray out loud for one another
 - Share openly and honestly our hurts, hopes, questions and comments
 - Hold one another’s sharing as the confidences of a friend.
- Simple Prayer asking God to be present with us.

This Week’s Scripture

Psalm 22:1-11

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
3 Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
4 In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
5 To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
6 But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
7 All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
8 “Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”
9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.
10 On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
11 Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.*

Commentary

The psalmist in this well-known passage describes an inner experience of separation from God. He is feeling the pangs of isolation from the object of his deepest, inner yearnings. He is not doubting the existence of God. In fact, his pain is the direct result of his knowing the reality of God and not being able to see God’s hand upon his life. This experience of isolation sparks a fire-storm of self-doubt as he calls himself “... a worm, not human....” Yet, even in his desolation, the psalmist speaks of trust in the God who

“took me from the womb...” He prays that God will be near when trouble draws near to him.

Our Soul is that part of our lives where we know things far deeper than ideas. It is the realm of the will and emotions, where the real is that which is felt even though it may not be understood. It is there that the Psalmist knows of God’s presence and love, even though his head cannot find the evidence. It is there that the Psalmist finds the capacity to trust, drawing upon experiences that occurred long before he was able to think his way through them.

Soul Prayer is that capacity to “be still and know” that God is with us. It rises out of the very depths of our inner life.

Discussion Points

How do you encounter God with your inner life?

People carry on an inner dialogue with themselves throughout their waking hours. Even at night, our mind continues this dialogue through dreams.

Have you ever heard a voice, other than your own, in that dialogue?

Were you able to identify that voice? If so, whose was it?

That voice speaks to our inner experience, offering us insights or judgments upon our behavior and thoughts. Have you ever experienced that voice falling silent?

Soul prayer seeks to engage God’s voice within our internal dialogue. For some these may be words. For others that may come as impressions or feelings. For others it may simply be a dream or inner experience.

How do you experience God’s presence?

How do you engage God’s presence?

How do you respond when you no longer experience God’s presence?

What do you do to help to recover that experience of God’s presence?

Sharing

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- Build a prayer list for your group – start with concerns about others, then share prayer concerns about ourselves and our family.
- Share stories about your victories and your struggles from the previous month. Follow-up with sharing hopes and dreams as well as fears and concerns for the month ahead.
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This Week's Scripture

Deuteronomy 4:25-31

When you have had children and children's children, and become complacent in the land, if you act corruptly by making an idol in the form of anything, thus doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, and provoking him to anger, 26I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to occupy; you will not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27The LORD will scatter you among the peoples; only a few of you will be left among the nations where the LORD will lead you. 28There you will serve other gods made by human hands, objects of wood and stone that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. 29From there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul. 30In your distress, when all these things have happened to you in time to come, you will return to the LORD your God and heed him. 31Because the LORD your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them.

Commentary

Long life is no guarantee of feeling God's presence in our lives. As Moses notes in this passage, even when we become grand-parents, we cannot allow our complacency to overwhelm our faith. We are still subject to idolatry, trusting in things to fulfill our deepest longings.

Whenever we allow our trust to be misplaced, God will allow us to suffer the consequences of those decisions. We will scatter ourselves from the Land of the promise and we will be forced to serve other gods made with human hands. However, God will not abandon or forget us.

If we truly seek God with all our heart and soul, we shall find God because God wants to be found. God wants to stay in covenant with us. The decision to be renewed is spirit is always ours. God is always ready to be found by the heart that seeks Him.

Discussion Points

It is an unfortunate fact, that we prefer gods that we can control. We prefer a god that was fashioned by our own hands to protect us from the powers and the principalities. There is only one problem, these little gods cannot fulfill the trust we place in them.

However, our God is patient and will wait us out. When we finally turn our hearts and souls to God, God will be found.

What little gods have you trusted to protect you from hard times and difficulties?

How did those little gods fare as saviors?

The good news is that regardless of how old we are or how far we have traveled from God, God is willing and able to receive us again. All it takes is a seeking after God with heart and soul.

How do you seek after God with your heart, your physical life?

How do you seek after God with your soul, your inner life?

How does the promise that God will allow God's own self to be found affect your seeking?

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This Week’s Scripture

Psalm 6

*O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.*

*2 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.*

*3 My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD—how long?*

*4 Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.*

*5 For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise?*

*6 I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.*

*7 My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.*

*8 Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.*

*9 The LORD has heard my supplication;
the LORD accepts my prayer.*

*10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror;
they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.*

Commentary

There are those times when our lives just do not feel very comfortable. Things have a way of falling apart in our hands. Relationships seem far too complicated to bear. No matter what we say or do, things just seem to go from bad to worse. We feel like our inside life and outside living are out of sync and nothing can seem to get them together.

Psalm 6 is written from a heart that is feeling very weak and vulnerable. It is a heart that is tired of being tired, weary of being weary, and frustrated by being frustrated.

In such moments, the Psalmist turns to the only source of support that he can count on in that moment, the loving presence of God. The Psalmist's faith is able to help him see through the sadness and despair and embrace the only resource that he has to help him through the moments.

The prayer does not make the sorrows disappear; they simply make them bearable until such time as the soul finds new strength.

Discussion Points

When our souls, our inner lives feel weak we need some sort of support simply to help us endure. Hope offers us that support. It causes us to lift our eyes from the pain so that we might see the promise.

Describe a moment when you felt a weakness in your soul, your inner life where your will and emotional life reside.

Some people describe that moment as a sinking pit where the harder they try to escape the deeper the pit seems. Have you ever felt this way?

The first rule of escaping a pit is to stop digging. What sort of things can we do to stop digging and begin the journey out of the "pit of our despair?"

The best part of escaping a pit is the freedom we feel when we see the horizon once again. How might that experience help you the next time you find yourself in a pit?

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This Week’s Scripture

Isaiah 56:9-12

*All you wild animals,
all you wild animals in the forest, come to devour!*

*10 Israel’s sentinels are blind,
they are all without knowledge;
they are all silent dogs
that cannot bark;
dreaming, lying down,
loving to slumber.*

*11 The dogs have a mighty appetite;
they never have enough.*

*The shepherds also have no understanding;
they have all turned to their own way,
to their own gain, one and all.*

*12 “Come,” they say, “let us get wine;
let us fill ourselves with strong drink.
And tomorrow will be like today,
great beyond measure.”*

Commentary

Isaiah’s imagery of wild animals and dogs speaks to those times in our lives when we are driven purely by our instincts and appetites. We act before we think. We do before we consider the consequences. We are driven either by short-term desires or wrong-headed assumptions and ideas.

Isaiah was speaking to a generation of leaders in Israel who had lost their ability to discern the hand of God on their lives. They believed that tomorrow would be like today. The armies of their enemies would never attack. God would protect them. They could fill their bellies with wine and not worry about the clouds on the horizons.

They had become weak in their minds, their understanding of the ways of God and the world. And, according to Isaiah, such a weakness could prove fatal.

Discussion Points

A weak mind is generally not aware of its own weakness. If we know that we do not understand something, then we already know the most important thing about it. But, to be unaware of our ignorance is a dangerous circumstance. The only thing that saves us from our own ignorance is a wondrous capacity for curiosity, of forming questions and seeking out answers. In that process, understanding is acquired and wisdom grows.

Have you ever been blindsided by a problem? It seemed to have come out of no where and stopped you dead in your tracks?

How do you respond to being blindsided? Do you get angry and look for someone or something to blame? Or do you try and understand where it came from so that you can be better prepared next time?

Discerning God's leading requires a mind that is freed to understand how God works in the world. The sentinels of Israel believed that since God loved them, they did not need to worry about the armies that were gathering on their borders. They believed that God would protect them. When the armies attacked they blamed God for not protecting them. This is not the way of understanding and wisdom. How do you understand God to be at work in your world? If something bad happens, who do you blame?

How might a healthy curiosity help us to develop a deeper understanding and gain wisdom for our journey?

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