

So Panteth My Soul

by Leonard Ravenhill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God and prioritizing Him above all else, and encourages listeners to cultivate a deep desire for God's presence and provision.

Duration: 1:03:41

Scripture: Psalm 23:1, Psalm 42:1, Psalm 139:5

Topics: "Seeking God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Psalm 42 and the longing of the soul for God. The speaker emphasizes the deep thirst and desire for God that the psalmist expresses in the text. The sermon also touches on the challenges and trials that Job faced, highlighting his unwavering faith despite losing everything. The preacher encourages the audience to trust in God's unchanging love and to find comfort and strength in Him.

Transcript

Psalm 42, psalm number 42. As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O my God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? There's an imaginary magic to some people about the new year. I got a challenge even last night on the news, listening to a question put to Mr. Carter. And somebody said, did you sit up all night? He said, no, I went to bed at the normal time, set my clock for five to twelve, got out of bed and was back in bed at five past.

I thought that's pretty good. I'm determined, he said, not to waste time. Now that's a precious thing, that might be a good vow for us during the year.

But you know, the psalmist had it right, and the hymn has it right, when it says, new every morning are thy mercies, and great is thy faithfulness. There's nothing magic about a new year's day. Every new day is a new year, as it were.

It offers new challenges, it's an uncharted course. People will make vows. Don't look behind you right now, but maybe your past year is strewn with unfulfilled promises, and dashed hopes, and commitments you didn't keep, and promises that you didn't get through with.

Well, let's do as Paul says, forget those things which are behind right now. But I made up my mind for this year that my goal is God. When I think of this psalm, I think of a hymn, it's in our book, don't look at it, but you can read it some other time, and maybe we'll sing it.

It was written by a man by the name of Rhodes, pardon me, Francis, I think, Francis Brooks, and he wrote this, My goal is God himself, not joy, not peace, not even blessing, but it's thee, my God. It is his to lead me there, not mine, but his. Now listen to this, At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.

Now that's pretty brave. At any cost, by any road. So faith bounds forward to its goal in God, and love can trust her Lord to lead her there.

Upheld by him, my soul is following hard, till God hath fulfilled my deepest prayer. No matter if the way be sometimes dark, no matter though the path be oft times great, he knoweth how I best shall reach the mark. The way that leads to him must needs be straight.

One thing I know I cannot say him nay. One thing I do, I press toward my Lord. My God, my glory, here from day to day, I'm in the glory there, my great reward.

It follows to me in the, in keeping with this text, my goal is God himself, not joy, not peace. Now there's a year ahead of us, you can do one of two things with it, drift through it or drive through it, it's up to you. You can make circumstances stepping stones to higher things, or we can let them overcome us.

The danger of getting into hard places is, we might become hard with them. Getting into bitter situations, we might become bitter with them. And as one man said after he had had a severe trial in his life, losing a daughter, and then some other tragedy came on top of it.

He said, I learned this out of this dark, dark valley through which I trod, that the circumstances of life make me bitter or they make me better. There's not much change in the word is there, just one single, just one single letter, better or bitter. Now if you notice this psalm is, at the head of it, it says it is to the chief musician, Masgil, for the sons of Cora.

Now I don't know who the chief musician was. Masgil is a type of poem, like you might say about a writing. You can write prose, you can write verse, you can write poetry, you can write an ode.

And this is just one style that was in the, in the Hebrew writing, Masgil. I'm going to make a guess that this psalm was written by David. It smells of him, if I can use that word.

It's his type of argument. It fits in with the pattern of his life. Just during this past year, somebody published the previously unpublished diary of a very famous man and it sold very well.

I like to read other people's diaries. I read my sister's when she was courting, it was tremendous. She saw more in one week, her boyfriend saw more in one week in her than I'd seen in all the 15 years I've been living with her.

It was fantastic. She was everything and I'd never, never even noticed. But that's by the way.

So you know the psalms really are David's personal diary. It used to be a custom as far back as 100 years ago for a man like Wesley and others to write a daily journal. Now if you've never done that, try it this year.

We'd like to do it. Be honest, don't put any fancy stuff in it so somebody will write a book about you when you die. Writer, I got up miserable this morning.

I was sour all day, almost kicked the cat out. And, and you know, be dead honest with yourself. And read it at the end of the month and, and see how spiritual you really are.

It's, it's pretty, pretty good stuff to do. You see, because, because one day it's going to catch up with us anyhow. God never puts any false records about any of this.

And, and David to me, he, he does what D.L. Moody said nobody dare do. He said if, if God gave somebody a camera that would take a photograph of our hearts, well even if we dared sit for the picture, he'd never show it to anybody. Well, well David's the very opposite of that.

He, he flings the door open. He says, come on walk down the corridors of my spirit. Come and see the excitement that is in God.

Now, now I can't tell you exactly and I don't think anybody else can, can, can tell you just what period of David's life he wrote this in. I can tell you from the writing in the chapter he was snowed under with grief and difficulty, tears and affliction. All thy billows have gone over me.

He uses excessive language as he so often does. There's nothing mild about this man. He never mutters anything.

He shouts it. He's never embarrassed. Even if he's sinned, he's brave to declare it.

He says, my heart panteth after the water brooks. He said much the same thing. You remember in the 84th Psalm he says, my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

And then right after that he says, a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than be the chief guest in the tents of the wicked. Now will you notice here he has his priority straight.

What does he say? He says, as the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. If you notice perhaps on your Bible as mine, as the heart panteth, there's a number nine at the side of that panteth in my book. And in the margin it says, for that number nine, breath.

You see, usually we interpret this as the heart. The heart is a type of a deer, a stag. And we visualize this thing that has been tormented.

It's been pursued by angry, hungry dogs. It's been chased by a relentless enemy. Maybe it was a prime specimen.

I don't know how many points it would have. I think it was in the time of Sir Walter Scott, a group of people were meeting for dinner in a very beautiful mansion in Scotland. And in sheer fun, one of the men took a siphon.

You remember the siphons used to press and the soda water came out. They used to mix soda water with lemon juice and all the other things. And in fun, this man, he picked this siphon up, pressed the thing and turned it to the man and he ducked and all that sparkling water went down the wall and stained the wall that had just been decorated some weeks before.

And quickly, a man who was an artist, I've forgotten his name for the moment, he took his pencil, he began to sketch and he sketched a monstrous stag on a rock. It's a classic picture in Scotland. It's called the Mammoth of the Glen.

It shows this beast with its head up and its many, many points there and its tongue is out. It's being pursued and its eyes are distended and its flanks are steaming with perspiration, with foam. And usually this is the interpretation given to this psalm that here is a poor beast.

It's being hunted again by angry dogs, hungry dogs. A relentless man, he wants that prize. He's going to get it at any cost.

He doesn't care if the thing is almost bursting its heart. He doesn't care if it is sweating. He doesn't care if its tongue is like leather.

He's going to get that prize. Well, I wouldn't argue with that. A justifiable interpretation.

I don't think it's the only one. Maybe it's not the best one. Supposing the beast was living in a period of drought.

Supposing the weather was extremely hot. Maybe it was able to find a little vegetation but it couldn't find any water. And animals are like human beings.

They can live quite a while without food. They cannot live without water. And so the thing lifts up its voice and it brays hoping there'll be an answer from somewhere.

Come over here, there's water here. I'm dying of thirst. I'm exhausted.

My energies have gone. I've no resources left. Come to my help.

Well, that could be the other picture. But notice here that the the Sami says that just like that panting heart. You might say to that heart if it could listen, listen, don't get too worried about water.

Look over there, there's a bunch of your friends. Go and go and jump around with them. Go over there, there's some grass.

Go over there, there's some shade. You can get. No, no, no, no.

The only thing this thing wants instinctively wants water. I think if somebody in our day had gone along to this this wonderful man, this Samist. They just said, hey, listen, I want to tell you something.

Now, don't you let the devil get in right here. Keep your chin up, man. You're under the weather.

It's going to pass anyhow. Isn't it true that days change? Isn't it true we're like yo-yos in our feelings, our emotions, and everything else about us, our nerves? What do you think of your past record? Hey, come here, David. Come here, come on, come on.

Lift your head up for a minute. Remember when you were going down the main street of Jerusalem and thousands were clapping their hands and saying, Saul has slain his thousands. But David is tens of thousands.

Take comfort in the fact you gave us the greatest psalm that has been written, the 23rd psalm. Now, why don't you look at your record, and discover all the things that you've done. Remember when people got it whispered around town, you're about 15 years of age.

You destroyed a lion one day that came to destroy your sheep. Another night you killed a bear. And remember when everybody yelled, like an earthquake, he's slain him.

The day you killed Goliath. Come on, man, back up. All you have to look around is all your diplomas and all the rewards you have.

There's never been a king like you anyhow. Oh, you didn't stand the tallest Saul for sure. He was the tallest man in Israel.

But remember there came a day when you were the head of the parade and they forgot him. Listen, listen, listen, bend your ear. You can hear them singing in the sanctuary.

They're singing one of the psalms you wrote, the latest thing you wrote there. Cheer up. The man has more sense than to do that.

He says, I'm not satisfied with anything except God. My goal is God himself. Not joy, not peace, not even blessing, not the favors.

And I want God. I need him. I don't know whatever need you'll have in 1977, but I'll tell you this.

You'll need God more than ever. You've needed him in your life. And your soul will not be satisfied.

Does it matter if everything's right? If your relationship with God is wrong? Does it matter if everything is wrong? If your relationship with God is right? He says, my goal is God himself. Tears have been my meat, by night and by day. But he knows that he's got everything in its right place, in its priorities, you see.

The heart panteth after the water brooks, and I'm panting after thee. I like that. It suggests the man is desperate for one thing.

He knows what he desires. Was it he who said, one thing of I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after? If you and I are going to seek God this year, and I for one confess that he is my goal more than ever, I'm not thrilled with anything else really. I hope to end up by the end of this year, if Jesus tarries, and I'm still alive with a greater concept of God than I've ever had before.

I listened to a tape someone sent me yesterday by one of the great preachers in the country. And he said, I had decided, he says to his congregation, and it's thousands that he preaches to, I had decided to preach to you a series of sermons on God. But I can't do it, because I don't know him.

I know him in part, he said, but I don't know him as I want to convey that revelation to you. There's still something vague, the image isn't clear. I don't know him and nor his power.

You don't find many honest preachers these days, and for to say that to a couple of thousand people is a pretty daring thing. He continues in the second verse, he says, my soul thirsteth for God. And then he adds that beautiful thing, for the living God, hallelujah.

I don't know how many times the Lord has reminded me this week of Jesus standing at the book of the revelation. And after all, you can have all the other witnesses. Remember what Paul says, isn't it? 1 Corinthians 15, where he gives you a list of those post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

He appeared to Mary, he appeared to Peter, he appeared to me also. But at the end of the line, Jesus says, I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Will thou not to shake us to our foundations, and thumb your nose to the devil and circumstances, and say, he's alive.

One thing to sit here and sing, because we were chosen, asked to sing, and we sing it regimentally, and quite so. I serve a risen Savior, is he living? Not only is he living in heaven, is he living in me? Because I'll tell you one thing, Satan can attack me, but if he attacks Jesus, he'll lose, because he never beat Jesus yet. And as Martin Luther said, there came a day when, when I died, and when Satan came to the door of my heart and mouth, I opened the door and said, listen, Jesus lives there.

He said he walked away, he couldn't face him. He can face Martin Luther. He can face my theology.

He can face my reasoning. He can face my arguments. He cannot face the Christ in me.

Well, the only way that I can stand with any authority is to know that he's not merely my Savior, but also he's my Lord too. But he says, I thirst for God, for the living God. Now, that's his first priority.

He says in verse 3, my tears have been my meat, day and night. No, pardon me, at the end of verse 2. When shall I come and appear before God? What is he talking about? There are some who are saying here, that he's thinking about the Feast of Tabernacles, the time when they had great joy and great ecstasy. Why is he exiled? What has happened to this man? He wrote, I think, the most terrifying psalm of all, Psalm 139.

And you may remember in it, he says, Whither shall I go from thy presence? And whither shall I flee from thy spirit? If I make my bed in hell, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and go to the other. There's no escaping God.

And then he says, God is afar off. How did he come to his back sliding? Or is it that God graciously has put him into exile for a little while? The heart panteth after the water, but I need water, I need water, I'll die. But I'll die looking for water.

But hey, what about the flower? These are not real as nice as they look. But what about the flower in the field? Can it run looking for a stream? Can it run looking for water? No, no, no, no, no. Oh, the heart may pant.

The little plant may wither. While we were in the islands there, we were looking at some beautiful roses. And the folk at the house where we stayed bought a lot.

They're still in full bloom. They were beautiful. We put them in the garden.

But I know this just before we left, that at least one plant was withering. It couldn't get to the water. The water must be brought to it.

And there are times when it is infinite mercy instead of me having to, being able to go to the sanctuary. Remember what he says in that 84th psalm, so beautiful, he says, My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. And you know what? I ended the swallow, he says, the sparrow has found a house.

And the swallow a nest where she may lay her young. Even mine altars, oh my God. He almost ends the sparrow that has a nest in the roof of the house where it can hear the praises of God.

I'd like to be that little swallow. You know how a swallow sticks his nest on the side of the wall? And he says there, that it has an instinct. It goes back to that very place every time it's released.

And he says, My heart and my flesh cry out for God like that. And again, I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. And so he says, When shall I come and appear before him? Now you notice he didn't pine for the fellowship of the saints, before he pined for the presence of God.

Now look, if you're going to make God priority number one in your life, I guess all of us are going to have to do a bit of shaking and changing around. As I said to you often, and I say to myself more often, the good is so often the enemy of the best. As I said before, and I remind you of myself, that first of all, our fellowship is with the Father, and then with his Son Jesus Christ, and then with one another.

Be sure you don't change it round. You may find fellowship in the bookshop. Great! Some do.

It's their party for that. But it'll become your enemy if you prefer the bookshop to the secret place of prayer. I like reading the word of God.

I like preparing messages. I like preaching them too. There are no substitute for my private devotions with God.

My goal is God himself, not service. You see, we made it appear that if you kill yourself for God, no, no, no, no, no, no. You could sell a thousand books.

I could preach a thousand sermons, and maybe not give God what he wants. He wants me. I need him.

He needs me. Do you think God picks the stars up and plays with them like a child does with his marble? Do you think God looks at the rolling of the ocean, or the wonder of a sunset, and marvels at it? Those things roll off his fingers. I was purchased by his blood.

I am purchased through the death and resurrection of his son. I am precious to him. And when you're down in the weather, spit that in the devil's face and tell him it, will you? You're more precious to God than a thousand worlds this afternoon.

And you better not in any way insult God, and let Satan take advantage of you, or let Satan take advantage of me. I say this man is under the weather, and I don't know why. I can read between the lines, and I hope without getting off the lines, that in this situation, he's suffering adversity, calamity, and tragedy.

I think here he's actually running away from his spoiled son Absalom, who cheated him and took his throne. And he's running away, and maybe he's hidden in a cave. And it seems as though it's as dark as night, and he says, Oh, my billows! Will you notice that? He doesn't say Satan's billows.

He doesn't say my circumstances. He says, thy billows. There's a lovely old hymn.

Part of it says, Every joy or trial falleth from above. Traced upon our dial. I used to think it meant this, because boys used to say, I don't like your dial.

And I thought it meant my face. It means your sundial. They used to read the sundial.

And when the shadows came over, you couldn't tell the time. Do you think it's right to say that before anything comes to me, it does not matter how bitter it may be, I might as well just spit it out. That every joy or trial falleth from above.

Traced upon our dial by the son of love. Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care, not a blast of fury touches the spirit there. And then he says, Hidden in the hollow of his blessed hand.

Never foe can follow and never tray to stand. Wasn't it this same Psalmist? Sure it was. Who wrote somewhere, I don't know, Psalm 32, I think, when he says, My times are in my hands.

People often ask me if I have a secretary. I say, yes, he's very good. I do my best.

I happen to be my own secretary. But do you have a secretary? I say, oh yes, yes. Someone make your appointments? Yes, who? The Holy Ghost.

I don't make them. If I followed everybody's inclination and invitation that comes man, I'd need two jets. No, no, no, no.

Every joy or trial falleth from above. Trays to pass. We're hidden in the hollow of his blessed hand.

And if it encourages you, let me tell you something. He holds the world up with the other, so I don't think he's too much trouble with you, do you? He upholds all things by the word of his power. My times are in my hands.

And yet, will you notice how human he is in verse 5? He says, why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? He repeats the same thing in verse 11. He says, why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Will you notice what he says? At the end of verse 9, why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Now, that's a question for you. Some people say the Bible gives you all the answers.

It gives you a lot of questions too. Why do I go mourning? Wait a minute. Wait a minute.

Why am I in St. Clophanatius just now? Well, the Lord must not have risen from the dead. That's all to it. Or the devil got in and... No, no.

Come on. Come on. Come on.

I was... No, I'll be honest. I wasn't reading Job, but I was turning him over in my mind. And you remember when God was going to try Job, and Satan came up.

He never tells the truth. And his children are like him. But you remember Satan comes up and he says... No, God.

God, pardon me. It was God that put the challenge to Satan, not Satan to God. Satan, he says yes.

He says, Have you considered my servant Job? There's nobody like him in the earth. Boy, that's a great title. And he's perfect and he's upright.

There are three marvelous things. There's nobody like him in the earth. He's perfect in his obedience, and he's upright in all his dealing.

And Satan comes back with a quick answer. He says, Well, sure, anybody. Do you know why he's so pious? His piety is tied in with his prosperity.

Now, you kill his prosperity. Do you know what he'll do? He'll curse you to your face. And the Lord says, Well, I... No, I won't lift my hand upon him.

But I'll tell you what. You go smite him. Oh my.

Fancy God's going to employ Satan to make me a saint. Isn't that rough? You go smite him. And I've told you before, it's as though this is Job.

Here's Job and he has a hedge around him. Isn't that great? Satan said that. I didn't say.

Don't look so... Well, anyhow. I didn't say that. Satan says, Well, I can't get to him.

There's a hedge round about him. Pull the hedge away and I'll get to him. And the Lord says, I never take any direction from you, Lucifer.

I'll tell you what. I won't take the hedge away. I'll pull it a bit nearer to him.

And you can destroy everything outside the hedge. And so Satan comes down at a great time. Kills his asses and his goats and his sheep and everything.

And the next day he reports to heaven. And the Lord says, How did you get on with Job? Did he do what you prophesied? No, no, he didn't. Why? Well, the simple reason is this.

That there's a hedge round about him. And he can always buy more cattle, more sheep, more goats. And that's not a problem.

Now, will you take the hedge away and let me get to him? And the Lord says, No, I'll pull it in a bit nearer to him. So the first stroke was he sent Job bankrupt. The next stroke he went and killed his children.

Would you like to go to seven funeral? Or would a fourteen? His sons and daughters were all killed. And the Lord sat in heaven and didn't do a thing. Except watch them die.

Well, how did you get on? Well, I didn't get on too well. Did he break down? No, no, he didn't. As a matter of fact, he stiffened his resistance.

So what did he do? Well, he said, he says the Lord manages his life and his kingdom. And he just stood there and smiled and said, You know, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. You see, the devil thought he'd get credit for it.

He thought that Job would say, The Lord gave and Satan came and took it. But he says, The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Do you remember what God said to him? You can go and take what he has, but don't touch his body. And then he says, you can go touch his body, but you can't take his life. You see? You see? God isn't interested in you, whether you drive a Volkswagen or what in the world you drive.

Maybe a Jaguar XK or something. I don't know. He doesn't care whether you wear a ring.

I saw a lady over in Nassau the other day with one I suppose worth \$25,000. He could have come from Woolworths as far as I'm concerned and as far as God concerned. The only thing that God is concerned about is to bring you and me to maturity and maybe he's got another year to do it.

But he says you can take away his cattle, his sheep, his oxen, send him bankrupt. You can make him bereaved. All right, go touch his body, but you're not going to kill him.

You see, Satan can come from the outside up, up, up till he gets the very skin on your body and put blisters on that. And if you'd seen Job, he looked like a Christmas tree. Man, he got boils and ulcers and everything and he couldn't stand and he couldn't sit and he couldn't rest.

And right in that situation, I think it was an American who said it. Sounds like an Americanism, you know, when you've got friends like these, you don't need enemies. Bildad the Suite, Eliphaz the Temanite, some else a Zuite or something.

And do you know what? They all knew what Job didn't know. Job couldn't work it out what God was doing, but they all knew the answer. If you get into a jam in your spiritual life, somebody will come along and give you the answer in five minutes.

And they've been searching for God's will for five years in their own life, but they'll know it five minutes in yours. Amazing what wisdom suddenly comes upon us. Well now, come on, you mean to say that that holy, just, righteous God in heaven, he let you lose millions of dollars overnight, he let you lose your seven sons and now your body's covered with sores and ulcers? And then of course his wife came in to put a little more weight on and she says, curse God and die.

The Hebrew says, blaspheme God and go commit suicide. Get out of it. What are you trying to defend God for? You know there's neither rhyme nor reason in this.

And you know that got him right on the spot there. He says, I've waited for this. You all sit down, you miserable sinners, he says.

I want to tell you something. I'm bankrupt, I'm bereaved, I'm broken in body, I'm baffled, but I want to tell you something. If it gets ten times worse than this, and if even the worms start eating this body, I want to tell you something.

I know that my Redeemer lives and in my flesh I shall see God. And that's all he ever guaranteed me. That how rough the journey may be, how steep the hill may be, however heavy the burden may be, you can get through.

Again I say it's going to take something. It will take determination, it will take defiance of circumstances, your feelings, the in-laws, the outlaws and the devil. It will take dedication, this one thing I do and it will take determination.

You know we always use, for some reason anyhow, we use the classic case, at least we think the classic case is Job's patience. And you may say, well I'm having a tough time, I'm in a tight spot right now, you know, this is the thing. You know, God works according to his program, not mine.

I know what he's going to do, you say. I think I know why he's going to do it. The thing that gets to me is, I don't know when he's going to do it.

What about when your faith is that strong and yet somehow it's as black as hell and everything seems more like death and despondency and darkness and difficulty and discouragement. And yet down there, there's a peace, there's a settled knowledge, God is going to do this thing in his own time. You know, I think if any man deserved a little bit more than he got on earth, it was that man, the apostle Paul.

He was a character, wasn't he? Hmm? You know, the Lord gave him a vacation, he never gave me this, I wish he would, but he gave him a vacation. I don't know how long he was there. But let me tell you this without you looking, in 2 Corinthians 12 he says this, he knew a man a few years ago and of course he's talking about himself.

And he says, do you know where he went? He went to paradise. Martha and I went to paradise the other day, paradise island, over in the island. He went to paradise.

Now most of us would have said, Lord, let me stay here. I don't want to go back to that rotten dunghill down there, let me stay here. Lord, you're not going to, I mean you're not teasing me with this.

And the Lord said, listen, you know the blinding glory you've seen here? You know what? You're never going to whisper a word of this. As I say, I don't think the Lord would ever put that burden on a woman. But he led this man, he said, listen, he said, all the things you've seen here in glory, you'll never tell a single soul.

Because I want them to walk by faith, not by sight. You've walked far enough. I can share it with you.

And he says, I went up to heaven and I heard unspeakable words that I'm not allowed to repeat. And it was glory. Well, that's all right.

Do you know what comes at the end of the chapter? He says, I have a thorn in the flesh. And I still have a thorn in the flesh. You see, lest I should be exalted above measure and say, listen, you can talk about your revelations as you like.

I'm the only man ever been to paradise. I walked up in the glory with the resurrected Christ. Took lunch one afternoon with Abraham and Isaac.

And I met a few of those marvelous characters you read about, you know. Those angels and those archangels. And I saw the seraphim.

But he says, lest I should be exalted above measure, I was given a thorn in the flesh. And I besought the Lord for this thing. I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart out of me.

But you see, God's blessing, God's denials, pardon me, God's delays are not God's denials. Faith that is going to be trusted is going to be tested. You know, the danger with all of us is we start counting our bruises.

And that isn't a hymn that says, count your bruises, name them one by one, is it? But that's what we do, don't we? You get in a tight spot and say, you know, only the other week I had this and I had that. You know, Mrs. Staunton never seems to get out like that. That's a very dangerous thing.

Paul says that I had a thorn in the flesh. I don't know what it was. I know some say it was his wife, but I'm not sure.

Others say it was his mother-in-law. But I don't think there's anything of that nature at all. There was something in him, I think, a physical defect that it never pleased God.

But wait a minute, that's not all. I wanted this to depart from me. And he says, you know what? I've got something bigger than that.

Man, I've got something a hundred times bigger than you being here. What is that? That I'm going to give you grace and grace and grace, that it gets worse and worse. I'll pour a blessing in commensurate to the difficulty that you're in.

Now, I suggest this. If you come into a situation this year, you've never been there, or if you're in one now, first of all, go home and have a time of praise. Thank God he trusted you with it.

You were big enough to take it. Because if you weren't, he wouldn't have given it to you. Isn't that what the scripture says? He's not a liar.

He will not suffer you to be tempered above what you're able. Now, the devil is trying to tell you, you're not able. As I say, thumb your nose to him.

Say, Lucifer, I've got a thumb in the flesh, and you know what? God isn't going to remove that flesh, but I'm going to get more revelation, more glory. First of all, I'm going to thank God for it. Secondly, I'm going to say, God, I thank you for trusting me.

Secondly, I thank you for the glory you're going to get out of it. Thirdly, I thank you for the improvement it will mean in my life. And fourthly, I thank you for the person that's concerned in this situation.

Listen to what he says. Oh, this is beautiful. You don't think so, I do.

Good preaching, this. Uh, he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect when you get a straight A for physical development, intellectual development, spiritual maturity. No, sir, he says the very opposite.

He says, my strength is made perfect in weakness. So that people will say, I'll tell you what, she had no strength when she started, and he had no strength when he started, and she didn't have much faith when she started. Oh, you should see how they have grown, and it's not of them, it's of him.

My strength, will you notice that? My grace, my strength. You thought it was your strength. It's not your strength, it's his strength.

It's his grace, it's his strength, therefore it must be his glory. Now listen to this. This changes the tune a little.

Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. If this is going to give me a greater revelation of yourself, if this is going to wean me from leaning on other things, if this is going to cause me to throw away those clutches I depended on, and I'm going to draw on all the hidden manner that there is in thee, then Lord, hallelujah for it. Now that's extravagant, but listen to this bit of boasting.

It says, therefore, I take pleasure in going to banquets, five dollar breakfasts, reading how to be happy in circumstances, finding that I'm immune from temptation, discovering I have to laugh because I'm filled with the spirit, and if I don't, folk might think I'm not. But that's how it goes these days. Listen to the man who was more filled than any other man that ever lived, for my opinion.

Listen, he says, therefore, I take pleasure in preaching. No. In doing miracles.

No. In being the chiefest of the apostles. No, no, no, no, no, no.

What does he say? He says, therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses. Boy, those are tasty, aren't they? I'd spit them all out. These are the very things we try to avoid.

But he says, don't you realize that if there's a persecution comes his way, he sandwiches it between blessing and grace? I take pleasure in infirmities. I rejoice. I delight in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake.

For when I'm weak, then I'm strong. Isn't it great that God has to strip us before he clothes us? Empties us before he fills us? Cast us down before he lifts us up? Get us away from others, sometimes from folk in fellowship, because you lean too much on them sometimes. And he says, look, I want you to, I want you to do what the psalmist says.

As the heart panteth after the water brooks. This man has passion. And he has purpose.

And he has peace. And he has power. Have you, you must have noticed, I'm sure you have, how often you've read a scripture, and then one day you read it, and it jumps up and you say, I never saw that before.

Well, I had a little experience like that the other day. I was reading in the hundred and, let me think, Psalm 139. Oh, that's the one I read from a few minutes before, when I spoke about a few minutes before, when he talks, you know, about, if I make my bed in hell.

But do you know what he says in verse 5? He says, thou hast beset me behind and before. Now, I read that because I read this during the week, a Psalm that this same man wrote, David, in the 23rd Psalm. It's a lovely Psalm, isn't it? I'm sure it's the best known Psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside still waters.

He restoreth my soul. And then he goes on and he says, goodness and mercy shall, what? Follow me. Oh, why don't they go ahead of me? I don't want them behind me.

I've never read that. I've never understood that before, have you? Why do they come behind me? I want goodness and mercy to go before me. And if there's a line away, sock him, get him out of the way.

And if there's a giant in the way, pull him down. And if there's a big hole, fill it in. And if there's a big heavy cloud, blow it on one side.

Goodness and mercy shall follow me. Do you know why? Because I need a guard at the back as well as at the front. Do you remember what God did with Israel? He led them by a fiery cloudy pillar.

But when the enemy was pursuing me, he put the pillar behind them. He put the cloud behind them and the enemy couldn't discover where they were. And you know, I need goodness and mercy behind me.

Sometimes that's my faults will chase after me. And maybe some of the sins I committed years ago will come. And some of the mistakes I made, they'll come after me and harm me.

And God says, no. I put a fence there. I put a barrier there.

Goodness and mercy are there. Not only that, he says they shall follow me. They shall follow me all the days of my life.

I used to sing a hymn years ago and I couldn't think of the beginning of it. But I remember part of it says this, man may trouble and distress me, it will but drive me to thy breast. Another hymn I think Isaac Watts wrote, God is the refuge of his saints.

When storms of sharp distress invade, behold, ere we can offer our complaint, behold him present with his aid. Let mountains from their seats be hurled down to the deeps and buried there. Convulsions shake the solid world, our faith.

But it was Madam Gein, if I remember right, who said, with thee my God to guide the way, it is equal joy to go or stay. Could I be cast where thou art not? That were indeed a dreadful spot. But with my God to guide the way, it is equal joy to go or stay.

If God is going to be my goal, my supreme, my great joy this year, well, I'm asking for opposition, more than I've ever had before. I'm asking for difficulties. I'm asking for trials.

And that word has come back to me more and more during this week, this past week. He that spared not his own son. And again it says that, that, that that son learned obedience by the things that he suffered.

Wouldn't it be nice if God gave you in a capsule and you could swallow it with a drink of water and tomorrow morning I'll wake up a saint. And I'll take another tomorrow and the next day I'll wake up mature. And the next day, well, oh, I'll have some other exhilarating experience.

Well, if I'm going to prefer Jerusalem above my chief joy, that's what the Psalmist said, or I prefer God, of course, even above Jerusalem. Well, there's one thing for sure I'm going to do. I've used the illustration often, but when I was traveling earlier in a few years ago and I'd be at the other end of the earth and somebody would say, hey, do you know, you're a stack of mail.

You've got about 10 letters there. And I'd go and I'd look them all through and I'd say, hey, oh, who's that from? My wife. Always read the letter from Martha first.

Supposing I came home and said, well, sweetie, my, I've been, I remember I stayed away 10 months. It seemed like 10 years. And I got home and I said, well, sweetie, now, you know, I like good, strong tea.

Make me some good tea and give me some cakes and I'm going to sit down. And I opened my satchel and I have all the letters. I have them all numbered.

And I start, she says, what did I say? Sweetie, these are all your letters. Going to read them all first. Now, well, darling, I've been so busy.

Do you know how many times I've preached? Do you know how many miles I've traveled? Do you know what I've done? I've this, I've that. No, no, no, no, no. Soon as I got to a place, I read that letter.

You see, that's why I say, the company of God's people is right. But if you rather sit and talk with somebody three hours about Jesus and only pray 10 minutes, who do you think you love most? Who are you serving most? If I love him, I'm going to read his love letters, his word. That's what they are, really.

They're love letters. Now, we're human beings. I know that all right.

I know Satan's subtle and he's smart. I know we have feelings and emotions and so forth and so on. But you know, actually, as I look back over this week, I said to myself, well, if there were ever any saints that ought to be invincible and immovable and steadfast, surely we ought to be those under God's heaven.

After all, with the complete revelation of God, with 2,000 years of church history, we've read thrilling stories. But it won't do you much good to read The Hiding Place if you're going to fall down and collapse as soon as the devil comes after you. May have done Corrie, Corrie, what's her name? Corrie Ten Boom good and she may have done a great job.

Won't do you a hill of beans good unless you've learned to get inside that 90th Psalm. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide. Again, hidden in the hollow.

I like that verse. Like a river glorious. It was in our other little book, I think we used to sing from.

Like a river glorious is God's perfect peace. Over all victorious in its bright increase. Perfect yet it flows fuller every day.

Perfect yet it goes deeper all the way. Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blessed. This man has discovered, oh he's had his heyday.

Yes sir, he was at the head of the Roses parade right through Jerusalem when they waved and sang and shrieked. Saul has slain his thousands, David his tens of thousands. He was the hero when everybody screamed he killed Goliath.

He's the man that wrote more psalms than any other individual. He wrote about 75 out of 150. He's had his heyday.

He's had his bright day. But he suddenly says this. Listen, I'm in a jam now.

My son's turned. He's a traitor to me. And billows have gone over me.

And I've lost my kingdom. I've lost. But listen, I tell you what it's done.

It's made me realize the vanity of life. And I'm going to pursue after God. Gaze on his majesty.

Gaze on his mercy. Gaze on all the blessings he's bestowed on your life. And tell him this year.

And I trust you will. And I am. I'm going to tell him every day.

My goal is God himself. He may break my heart doing it. Because you see, if he loves me, he'll whisper his secrets to me that he won't tell to somebody else.

He'll share some. Oh, it's not all apple pie. It's not all sitting on the side of the road whistling lovely hymns.

There'll be times when it's grim and heavy and bloody. The apostle knew all these exciting things. He knew what it was to rot in a prison and be forgotten.

He knew what it was to be tied to a whipping post and lashed 195 times. Man alive, that would have killed most of us. He knew what it was to have his face ripped open with rocks and lie bleeding in the sand outside of a city called Lystra.

And hear people say, through with him at last. Time he got rid of that lousy, stupid man anyhow. Think he has the greatest brain in the world.

And he follows a strange man called Jesus and thinks he's going to upset the Roman Empire and do everything. But you don't know the names of one of the men that threw a rock at him, do you? You don't know the name of the man that put the whip there and put those lovely pieces, what they used to do. They used to put about an inch of copper sharp.

And they had nine or ten or fifteen tails on that whip. And they lashed it down his back until it was like a ploughed field and the blood ran out. And then they threw him down.

And you know what he says? And I, I, I thank God I have enough grace to go through every day. He doesn't say that. He makes the devil mad.

He says, come on, pile it on. I glory in tribulation, in necessities, in reproaches. I'm filling up some of the sufferings of Christ.

I stood in church and sang, O to thee, like thee, blessed Redeemer. And you know what? He lets me share some of it. He may open your eyes one day and burden you for the rest of your life to pray for revival in China or some other country.

Sure, if you have a friend, you share his deepest secrets with them. And the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. He doesn't share any with you.

You better find out why he doesn't. He doesn't shout them from the housetop. He doesn't preach them from the pulpit.

He gets us alone. And when he's done it, he'll say the same as he did to the man that he lifted to heaven. Listen, this is between you and me.

Say nothing about it. My goal is God himself, not joy, not peace. Yes, I may have to say the waves have gone over me.

Somebody deserted me. Somebody failed me. But again, as the hymn says, his wisdom never faileth.

His sight is never dim. He knows the way he taketh. And I will walk with him.

Let's sing one, two, four. I think at least we can try. I don't think we've ever sung it.

I've never tried to sing it, but we could try to sing it. One, two, three. In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear.

Do you know the tune, O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to them? One, two, four. Let's sing it to that tune. In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear.

And safe is that 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 waketh, his sight is never dim. He knows the way he taketh, and I will walk with him.

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