

Worship in All Circumstances: Spiritual Drought

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 July 2016

Preacher: Chris Thornton

[0 : 00] Good morning. Oh, that's terrible. Good morning. Oh, so much better. So much better. Good.

Welcome to Watermark. If you don't know me, my name's Chris. I help oversee some of the community groups here. And we're kind of going through a series over the summer, looking at the Psalms.

I feel like I've got a bit of echo going on here. Can we work on that? Thank you. And the Psalms have been the favorite book of many Christians over the centuries because they're really, most of the Bible is about God speaking to us.

The Psalms are us speaking back to God. They're basically the prayer book of the Bible. It's like, how do you, in the seasons of life, in the course of life, whatever's going on in your life, how do you relate to God in the seasons?

And that's what Psalms is going on about. Whether you feel like your life is like a calm, serene lake, or you feel like the waves are crashing down on you right at the moment, the Psalms are going to teach you how to live well with God in all the seasons.

[1 : 12] And last week we talked about happiness. And we talked about how one of the defining characteristics of Christians is that we have a deep-rooted happiness that we find in God.

The early Christian writer Augustine said this. He said, So we were looking at happiness last week. This week, we're going to look at something which may sound as if it's completely the opposite of everything we said, but it's not. We're looking at spiritual drought. Okay?

Spiritual drought. By which I mean anything from discouragement to full-blown depression. Okay? Full range there. And you may be thinking, that sounds like a very happy topic for summer.

And it is. But if you read through the Psalms, a third of the Psalms are what we call lament. And lament means kind of complaining, misery.

[2 : 27] It's life is tough. And I don't know if you've ever read through the Psalms at all, but I've read it when I'm feeling happy. And when you're feeling happy, you come to like a passage like today.

And you know what? It just feels like a bit of a downer. Okay? You're happy. You're feeling great. And then you're reading about a depressed guy. It's not the kind of thing you want to do. So you kind of flick on to kind of some happy Psalm, like Psalm 23.

And everything is fine because the Lord's your shepherd. But that is not the way we should be praying and reading the Psalms. Because the Psalm isn't just for you if you're feeling dry or down. It's also this Psalm is for you if you're feeling happy today. Because it's going to tell you a couple of things. One is it's going to tell you sometime in your life, you will experience what this guy in the Psalm, and we'll talk about, experiences.

So you need to be prepared for it. The World Health Organization says by 2020, depression will be the second most significant health problem in the whole world. Just behind heart disease.

[3 : 33] Hong Kong, you just look at the suicide rate. You look at the fact that statistics show 25% of the workforce are said to be experiencing depressive symptoms. And you can see that this issue is everywhere.

So that's the first thing you need to realize. That this is sometime in your life, you're going to experience discouragement and spiritual drought. Secondly, you're going to know that your prayer life doesn't just revolve around you and your feelings.

The Psalms are meant to be prayed. I don't know if you realize. They're even meant to be sung.

Okay? But if you start praying this Psalm for people in the congregation who are going through this same thing, what it does, it will open your eyes to see with greater compassion, greater empathy, the people around you.

And you won't judge people who are going through a tough time and look at them and say, why is she so miserable? But you will have an empathy and a compassion and to be able to see them as you enter into the Psalms, that's what it's meant to be doing for you.

And this city needs a church which knows how to walk alongside people through the drought as well as through the good times so that we're rooted as we looked at last week and our leaves do not wither.

[4 : 49] So we're going to look at spiritual drought. We're going to look at three things. Spiritual drought is normal. What causes the drought? And what's the remedy? What's the cure for the drought?

Okay? Spiritual drought is normal. What causes it? What's the remedy? So if you've got your bulletin, just kind of have a look through the passage with me.

Psalm 42 verse 1 says, As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. And the psalmist begins with this image of a deer on a long, hot summer day where there's been no rain for weeks.

And it's like one of those wildlife documentaries, you know, and the deer is there gasping for water, dying in the heat. And he goes down to a stream where he thinks there's going to be water. He just wants a drop.

[5 : 46] And the stream's dried up. There's nothing there. It's empty. And that's what the psalmist is saying he feels like right now.

He says, I'm that deer. I'm thirsty for God. And I'm not chasing after all the kind of bad stuff in the world. I'm not chasing after just life for my comfort. I'm thirsty for God.

And I've come down to the stream of living water who is God himself. And it feels like, God, you've dried up. Evaporated. You've gone. And I'm left spiritually dry, fainting in the heat of my circumstances.

And he cries out later on in verse 3. He says, When shall I come and appear before God? Literally, it's when shall I come and see the face of God? He can't feel God's presence.

He feels like bouncers are on the door of heaven and they're not letting him in. And the crazy thing about this psalm is that the psalmist hasn't done anything wrong. You know, there are plenty of places in the psalms where the psalmist feels cut off from God and it's because of his own fault.

[6 : 52] It's because of his own sin. But that's not the case here. There's no confession of sin. He's not done anything wrong. And like a dazed deer, this psalmist just doesn't get what's going on.

He's lost, he's confused, he's depressed. It feels like God's gone missing. And here's something we, just a really important lesson for us to learn. Our society encourages us to judge our life and judge everything based on your feelings, right?

You know, this relationship, it just feels right. We even say like we judge what's true or not based on whether it feels good to me or not, okay?

I join certain organizations. I enter relationships. I do what I think feels right for me. But what many Christians, and many of you are going to struggle with what I'm going to say now, which is spiritual drought, where God's presence seems absent at times, is a normal Christian experience.

It's normal, okay? Many, if you're a new Christian or a young Christian, and you go through this period where sometimes it feels like God's gone AWOL, your joy is gone, your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, you may begin to think there's something wrong with you.

[8 : 12] I see this all the time. Maybe I haven't read my Bible recently enough. Maybe I need to pray more. Maybe God's punishing me for something I did wrong. You know? All those kind of things go around in our mind.

And everyone else around you seems happy enough, and you feel like you're the only one who's got a problem. I don't know if you've been there. I've been there. And you know, I see when you're in that place, you can sometimes wonder, is your faith really real or not?

And particularly if you just heard a sermon about how Christians are supposed to be happy, and you feel like about as far away from that as Britain is from Europe at the moment. But I think if we have that approach where we base my relationship on God determined by how my present feelings are, I think this is what I would call coffee machine Christianity.

You know, I press this button, read Bible, and out of it I expect to flow feelings of joy and love. You know, I press regular church attendance, and I expect a flow of kind of life's blessings to come down upon me.

But what happens when you press the Bible button, and all you seem to get is lukewarm, tasteless feelings, or sometimes you get nothing? You think, either I'm pressing the wrong button, or there's a problem with the coffee machine, God in this case.

[9 : 34] And like Job in the Bible, who's another guy, if you've read the story of Job, another guy who feels like God is absent, his friends assumed, because he was having a hard time, distance from God, they assumed it was because of his sin.

Now, sin can distance you from God. We've said that already. You've got to examine yourself first. But for Job, as for this psalmist, that's not the issue. It's not his sin. John Piper says, My feelings are echoes and responses to what my mind perceives.

And sometimes, many times, my feelings are out of sync with the truth. Because, you know, your feelings are variable. According to your temperament, some of you get more moody than other people, the season of life you're in.

And when you start to base your life on your feelings, and you start getting into that, what am I doing wrong phase, and trying to find some kind of quick fix to get your feelings back, your faith will become totally self-focused, feeling-based, not based on the truth of God's character.

And no relationship works like that. You know, feelings will come. But in a marriage, you don't always have the feelings. But God wants to have a real relationship with you, which is not based on a coffee machine relationship.

[10 : 56] You know, I'll scratch your back, God, by pressing the right buttons. If you scratch mine and give me some nice feelings. That's not the way God works. And this psalm is telling you, spiritual drowl, sooner or later, is going to come to you.

It's normal if you're a Christian. And if your only concern, if your only concern is just to get your feelings back, then you may miss some of what God is actually wanting to do in your life, rooting you in a deeper relationship with Him.

Spiritual drought is normal. Secondly, what causes a spiritual drought? Well, this psalm gives three reasons.

Okay? The first reason. Psalms shows us that the author here, he's not alone. Sorry, he is alone. And he's outside of community.

Now, we don't know exactly why the author is away from his community. But he's one of the sons of Korah who are kind of basically temple worship leaders. Okay?

[12 : 04] In Jerusalem. And if you look in verse 4, he says his experience of being in Jerusalem is of this amazing community. Okay? It's an amazing community where people sing God's praises.

They're there. They hear God's word being read together. They celebrate together. It's this amazing God-centered community. It's a bit like us as the church here. Okay? But now he's away from it.

He's away from Jerusalem. Reading verse 6, it said, he's in the land of Jordan. Up in the mountains. It's over 100 miles away. We don't know why he's there. Maybe he's been exiled.

Maybe he just had to move there for some reason. But he's alone. He doesn't have people around him to support him or walk with him. To help him to fight and regain joy in God.

And this is really interesting. Because we live in a culture which values kind of individualism. You know? And even in the church, this can come into our own way of thinking about the church.

[13 : 01] You know, we think, Christianity is about me and my relationship with God. And then maybe occasionally I come to church on a Sunday, listen to a sermon, and then talk to a couple of people and then head on out and live the rest of my life my way.

But actually, there's a huge difference. The Bible keeps telling you there's a huge difference between reading the Bible, prayer, spiritual activity, which is just by yourself, and doing those things in community.

They're different experiences. You need to do the individual and you need to do the corporate communal thing together. You see, if you live as a lone range Christian, thinking you can just come in, listen to a sermon, run out again, you will risk what this psalmist is going through, which is going to a spiritual desert by yourself.

Because when you're by yourself, you don't always know what's right and what's wrong. Because you believe and I believe my own lies about myself.

You know, I went through a period of spiritual drought for about four years. Four years. I didn't know where God was. My prayers didn't seem to get answered.

[14:14] I felt miserable. I felt lost. And I felt like a hypocrite because Christians are supposed to be happy, aren't they? And you know when you feel down and depressed, one of the last things you want to be is around other people.

Because you know, no one wants to be that blob in the corner. You know, a bit like, you know that the power station on Lama Island everything else is great but there's this eyesore in the middle, right?

You don't want to feel like that. And so, and you know, the only other people you feel happy around when you feel down are actually other depressed people. And that's not great either. It's this kind of depression pity party.

You know, it's not going to help you in any way at all. But the very community that I felt I wanted to avoid was exactly the community that I needed at that time. You know, I remember it's one girl invited me to join her community group.

I really didn't want to go. I don't know why I went. But actually, it was one of the turning points for me. Because here was a group of people and actually, I was this blob in the corner and they just accepted me.

[15:18] They weren't always saying, why are you looking so miserable, Chris? They weren't saying, you need to have more faith, Chris. Don't be one of those people who says that to people who are spiritually dry because that's just not helpful when the streams dried up.

But you see, the power of an accepting Christian community is extraordinary in your life. And if you run away from it, if you even now are going through a spiritual time of drought, don't ever withdraw from community because it's what you need most in the drought.

Because you need people to fight for your joy with you in that. Because otherwise, you'll begin to just base your happiness on your feelings or on your circumstances.

And that will always get you down. But let me add one more thing. In the psalm, if you notice, the psalmist in verse 4, he looks back and he remembers.

how good his community used to be. Listen, you may be good right now, but life was good for this guy. You see, life was happy.

[16:29] He used to feel like useful. He was leading the procession. He had purpose. He was in this buzzing community. But now for this guy, it's not like this. He feels like no one cares.

And he remembers and he looks back on the good old days and remembering back just makes him even more depressed. And you know, in Hong Kong, things are always changing.

You notice that? People are always transitioning in and out. Have you noticed that? Some of you are in the process of transition. And you know, this is one of the really challenging things, I think, that all of us can find here is because you're here for a while.

And if you've been here for a little while, you get to know somebody, you build a relationship with somebody and then after a year or two, what happens is they move on. Right? Have you experienced that? And maybe the new people who come are not quite the same as your old friends. And actually, it's really tiring if you have to kind of get back to building a relationship because you've already done the hard work of building a relationship. You don't want to keep doing it again. And maybe you might even be transitioning out to a new church or somewhere else or a new group and the music isn't the same as before.

[17:42] You know, the preaching isn't the same as before. And it's so easy to withdraw from community, to get disillusioned by it and to just passively kind of drift away.

And this psalmist is saying, don't do it. You've got to push in to make new friends, to make that step because community is where we were made to flourish.

Because if you don't, find people who you're accountable to, people who are going to run after you, people who are going to love you and support you, if you don't have that, you will wilt spiritually.

I can tell you and guarantee you will wilt spiritually. Because it's in these moments that actually God wants to deepen your roots in Him.

So let me ask you, even wherever season you're up to now, whether you're in transition, whether you're here, who knows you? Who are you accountable to? Who are you running towards? Don't run away from community, run into community.

[18:47] That's what we need. That's the first cause of spiritual drought, being away from community. Second cause of spiritual drought is disillusionment from outside pressure.

This guy, we don't know exactly what's going on in his life. We don't know whether it's sickness, pressure at work, other issues, but his enemies, have you noticed verse 3, his enemies are taunting him.

They're saying, where's your God? And it's got to him. You know, verse 9, he's asking, why have you forgotten me, God? People are persecuting him.

Life isn't working out the way he thought it should work out. And just look how he describes it. He says, deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls.

All your waves and breakers have swept over me. That is a picture, he's like saying, it's like I've been thrown in the Niagara Falls and I have water pounding on me from the top.

[19 : 47] I've got the current just swirling me around underneath. I feel like I've been placed in a tumble dryer, put on spin 50 times and I don't know which way I'm heading. I don't know where I am.

I'm lost. I'm confused. This isn't the way life was supposed to be. God, where are you? And you know, when you experience that and particularly in Hong Kong that sense of being overwhelmed by the circumstances of life, it's so easy for us to just, we just naturally go into God, why would you allow this to happen?

You know, I know people who, they become a Christian and you know, it's supposed to be great but the next year of their life is the worst year in the whole of their lives and they're like, God, what's the deal going on here?

I didn't sign up for this. This is not what it's supposed to be. Now, if you didn't have God and you were going through that, I think it would be a whole lot worse but that's what this psalmist is saying and he's saying you need to realize that sometimes life puts you in that tumble dryer and spins you up and down but actually, God is the place where you need to run to not the place where you need to run from because that's the second cause of spiritual drought is that disillusionment when you feel like life's not working.

you're out of community, third thing, and these are all connected. Our physical and emotional condition affects that feeling of spiritual drought, discouragement.

[21 : 32] Verse three, he says, my tears have been my food day and night. He's physically and emotionally exhausted. It seems like maybe he's not been eating properly.

He's been crying himself to sleep. We don't even know he's getting enough sleep here. He's crying night and day. This is a depressed guy. I mean, this is not a happy guy. But the more I talk to people, I realize that we live, particularly in the church, we live in this culture which divorces the spiritual from the physical.

Okay? So, some people think that if you're feeling down or depressed or discouraged or those kind, it's just a problem with the brain. So they'll say, oh, just take some antidepressants and you'll be fine.

Right? I don't know if you've heard that. I had that for myself. Other people, I meet many Christians in this category, they just think depression and feeling down is just this kind of moral problem. You know?

You need to pull yourself together. Just read the Bible. Have you, have you, have you got faith? And then they say, don't you know the rest of us have got problems but we're doing okay?

[22 : 42] Can't you just stop moaning and just get on with it? I reckon probably some of you have thought that when you've seen some miserable people. I know I have. Confession. Because we think it's just an oral issue.

Others think it's just an emotional thing. You just need people to listen to you. You need a therapist just to give you some kind of you time. Right? And so, so all you need is just a bit of TLC, personal therapy.

Just listen to them, accept them. That's all they need. But the Bible says we're holistic people.

We're physical, emotional, spiritual. We have all of these things and your physical and emotional condition will affect your spiritual condition.

I don't know if you heard this, sometimes I get to the point, it's confession time, I get to the point where I'm just like, man, I just don't want to read the Bible. And even before a sermon, I'm like, oh, what's the point sometimes?

What's the point in doing this? No one's going to listen. No one's going to listen. And then even when I'm preparing, sometimes I get these thoughts which come in which say, maybe I'm making this all up.

[23 : 48] Maybe this is just not real. Maybe I'm just being a complete idiot. And then I'm thinking, Chris, well, what's going on? Like, am I losing my faith? Do I have to pray more? Do I have to read more of the Bible? What have I got to do?

And then, and I'm working the church. And then, I have a good meal or I get some rest, I get some sleep. And then afterwards, I'm suddenly feeling fine.

And I'm like, what was going on there? Because, you know, when you're overtired or when you haven't been eating properly or sleeping properly or exercising properly, you know what?

It actually puts you in danger of spiritual drought because you are a whole being. You're not just a spirit. You're not just a body. You're not just emotions.

You're all of it together. And the Bible's solution is not just pull yourself together. It's not just take some medication. Even though these things are helpful, it's not just listen to it, have a therapist to listen to you.

[24 : 45] The Bible is saying it has a holistic solution for you. Sometimes you just need to get some rest, particularly in Hong Kong. So those are some of the causes.

Community, absence of community. disillusionment with outside pressure and things of life. The physical and emotional strains that we put on ourselves.

But what's the remedy for spiritual drought? What does the Bible give us? What does this psalmist teach us about how to get through spiritual drought? Three things.

Three things that God teaches us in this prayer. Okay, here they are. Pour out your soul. Question your soul. Preach to your soul. Okay, do you get that? Pour out your soul.

Question your soul. Preach to your soul. Here we go. Verse four. These things I remember as I pour out my soul. Verse nine.

[25 : 46] I will say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Do you see what he's doing here? He's not burying his emotions like I do so often.

He's not complaining to everyone else how bad life is and avoiding God. God, he's doing what Job does in the Bible and he runs straight to God with an honesty that many of us might find shocking. You know, I meet so many Christians who tell me, I'm just so angry with God for so and so and I say to them, have you told God that? And they say, am I allowed to?

And I say, don't you think he knows that already? You know, it's like when I was at school there was this kid who thought that if he couldn't see you then you couldn't see him.

And so when we'd play hide and seek, he would stand in the middle of the playground in full view of everybody and he'd do this. He'd cover his eyes with his hands and we'd be like, what's this guy on?

[26 : 47] And so we'd kind of go up to him, find him straight away and he'd be just like so surprised because he thought if he couldn't see you then you couldn't see him. I think that's how we do that with God.

If I don't tell him then he doesn't know. But he can see you from the inside out. Every emotion. So why do you hide? In fact, good relationships, you run to people with what's going on with you.

And this psalm is telling you don't bury your emotions, don't run to everyone else, run to God. If you feel he's absent, tell him. If you feel like you're overwhelmed by what he's brought into your life, tell him.

If you're angry with him, tell him. He already knows. It's not a secret. And he's big enough to cope with it. Pour out your soul. Some of us struggle with that.

And you know, if you're walking alongside other people, and I hope every one of you will be aware of the people around you who are going through this time. If you're walking alongside people in the spiritual desert, you've got to allow them to pour out their hearts.

[27 : 57] Listen to them. Don't jump in like Job's friends in the Bible who just keep thinking they've got all the solutions, they just jump in with a quick fix. Oh, okay, here's the ten things you need to do. Don't do it.

You need, you're not the person to fix them, right? You're not a fixer. God's the fixer. Listen to them. Give discouraged people the chance to speak or be silent sometimes.

Sometimes if they say the most outrageous things, just listen for a while. Pour out your soul. Next, question your soul. Do you notice what he says?

Why are you cast down, oh my soul? Why are you in turmoil, like a washing machine of emotions spinning around within you? What is he doing?

You know, it's not that there's this specific sin that has got him to this point, okay, when he's depressed, but when you are depressed, it's so easy to put your hope in anything to get you out of the situation.

[29 : 03] Medication, other people's approval, a new location, a new job, anything to make you feel better. But what is he doing? He's, at this time, he's asking him some questions.

He's examining himself at this point. Because when you're in the desert, there's no better time to examine, where am I putting my hope for my ultimate happiness in?

Is it something that can sustain me? You know, he's like a doctor who puts this stethoscope on his own heart and he asks himself these penetrating questions. Where am I putting my hope?

Is it in God at this time? Or is it in just trying to get these feelings back? You know, when your community is not what you want it to be, this great gift of community that I've said we need, but that can even become an idol when we think, if I don't have everything that I want it to be, is that what I've run to, to sustain my happiness more than Christ?

Do you ever ask yourselves the questions, what am I putting my hope in? Why am I so discouraged at the moment? Where's my ultimate happiness right now?

[30 : 15] Is it dependent on God? And you know, if you're walking with somebody else, you listen to them, listen to them well, but there's got to come a point where you are listening for where are they putting their hopes in?

Where are they putting their hopes? And like that good doctor, ask those questions with grace. Pour out your soul, question your soul, but sooner or later a doctor just doesn't listen and ask questions and say, bye.

There's got to be a remedy that you've got to give. And so the third thing is the remedy, third remedy is preach to your soul. What does the psalmist do? He says, verse five, hope in God for I shall again praise him.

Hope in God for I shall again. He's talking to himself. And I quoted Martin Lloyd-Jones last week.

I'm going to quote him again, a Welsh preacher. He said this, have you realized that most of your spiritual unhappiness is due to the fact you're listening to yourself rather than talking to yourself?

This psalm is showing you how to preach to yourself. Because when you're dealing with spiritual drought and discouragement, it's easy to think that there's nothing you can do about your emotions and anything at all.

[31 : 28] You just be passive, allowing it to, oh, I just feel terrible. And you wallow in it for a while. But you know, our feelings and our emotions, we don't generate them actively.

You know, if a lion walks into this room right now, you don't look at the lion and think, oh, big lion, big teeth, looks hungry, hmm, I think maybe I should be afraid.

Okay, let's decide to be afraid now. Do you do that? No, you just see the lion, fear wells up inside of you, right? You don't generate your feelings like that. But the thing is, your emotions are not your master.

Your emotions can be handled by you. They're not your master. Lloyd-Jones again says, the main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself.

You know, some of you have got more emotions than others. Okay, you need to know how to take yourself in hand. You have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. What do you preach?

[32 : 35] You preach the gospel to yourself. Here's how the psalmist says, my soul is cast down. Therefore, therefore, therefore, I remember you.

Verse 8, he says, what does he remember? He remembers who God is. He says he remembers his faithful love, seen all through the Bible.

He reminds himself of God's promises, his love which goes all through his faithfulness. He reminds himself of what God has done in his own life, his faithful love towards him specifically.

And this music leader in the temple writes a song to God. He writes it down. He recalls God's goodness. happiness. I'm a naturally optimistic person, but when I get discouraged, I can wallow in my misery for a while.

But what I see is I need to grab my emotions by the scruff of the neck and I need to say, now, Chris, listen to me. God has never left you.

[33 : 50] God is with you now. You're his child. He's working through this. You can trust him. He loves you. I need to speak to myself. Because if you fight, your emotions will catch up eventually.

But truth is true whether you feel it or not. You realize that? Truth is true whether you feel it or not. And it's what you need to preach yourself and we also need to be a community around each other who know how to preach the gospel to ourselves.

But you've got to listen to how it applies to them first. Don't just kind of charge in there with like bullet, gospel bullets kind of flying left, right and center. No, you've got to listen. Listen to where they need hope.

Listen to where they need to see encouragement. Be like a good doctor who listens so people can pour out their soul.

Ask questions of yourself and others and then we apply the truth of who God is to our own life and to the lives of other people. And you see what happens? There's hope in this.

[34 : 56] The psalmist says, I shall again praise him. It's not past tense. It's not even present tense. It's future tense knowing that God will bring him out of this spiritual drought.

And you know when you go through it, anyone who's been through it and has held on to God in it, you know you are so much stronger through it. You are more compassionate than you have ever been before. And you can learn a deeper joy in Christ.

It's not a coffee machine Christianity but true deep relationship in God because that's where he's rooting you. And here in the Hebrew, this psalmist, even in this psalm, is beginning to come out as he's speaking to himself.

You don't see it in your translation but the Hebrew in verse five it says, literally it says, I shall again praise him for the salvation of his face. It's kind of him out there.

When you get to verse 11 and then 43 verse five it says, for the salvation of my face. You see he's coming out of the pit because he's realizing God is not just out there somewhere.

[36 : 03] He's become to be more personal for me even as I'm wrestling through this time. Do you know how to preach your soul of God's love when you're discouraged, when you're downcast, when you're depressed?

Last thing. If this is the normal Christian experience, how do we know that God loves us when God is with us when God feels absent?

How do you know that? How can we say we can't base our life off our feelings? Well, this psalmist, he didn't know something. He didn't know that even though he's crying out for the presence of God, he didn't know Christ.

But we do. But we do. Because God himself came down, Emmanuel, God with us. And do you know this psalmist here?

Jesus was the one who said, I thirst. Jesus was the one who had no sin at all and yet he had his enemies mocking and taunting him saying, where's your God?

[37 : 18] Can't even save you now when he's on the cross. He's the one on the cross who cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus was abandoned.

He knew the true absence of his father so that you and I will never, ever, ever have to know that God is truly absent from us.

That's what Christianity says. God is a God who wants to be with you. Even when you don't feel it, he's there. How do I know? Because Christ came down into the darkness, took the darkness so that you can know that he is always there for you.

God is a God who wants to bring you back into the presence of his father and he wants to bring you back into the presence of a good God.

Christianity has a God who can sympathize with our weaknesses in the seasons of drought.

Whatever's going on in your life right now, whether you're feeling great or feeling terrible, he is sufficient for you.

[38 : 31] Let's be a community which knows how to live through drought and have a leaf which doesn't wither like we talked about last week to know that God is truly our joy because he will restore us to himself.

Let's pray. Father, I don't know what's going on in people's lives right now.

Some of us may feel like, oh, I don't need to worry about kind of spiritual drought at the moment and yet we're basing all our hopes and life just on our feelings and what we feel we can do by ourselves.

And we have little compassion for those who are struggling. Lord, I pray that you make us a church, which is a church in this city which is so downcast in so many ways.

Make us a beacon of light and hope in this city. I pray for those of us who are struggling, who are discouraged, who are disillusioned, who are transitioning and are worried about the next steps.

[39 : 51] Lord, I pray that you would help them to see that you are that source of joy that they can cling to, that you're not going to leave them. You're not running away, that you're right there with them and they can just keep running back to you.

I pray that you would help us to be a people who know how to love one another enough to share and speak the gospel to each other.

Please let us be a community which doesn't condemn people but really demonstrates a God who is present and with us in our lives.

Thank you. Your name. Amen.