

I often feel like all I can do is to just barely keep up w/demands of life
My days and weeks are cram-packed
At home, it's busy and fun with Emily and our kids
At church, the weeks are full and overflowing w/opportunities & tasks
And all throughout are texts, phone calls, get-togethers w/friends & family
Life is busy and life is good

But sometimes, I feel that I can be so pulled along by my commitments
That I'm almost doing life unconsciously
I don't even feel like I'm present—like I'm having an out of body experience
I'm going to meetings, I'm eating meals, I'm doing work
But it becomes robotic; a routine I'm going through but not invested in
When this happens, that's when I start getting clued in
That I have not been paying attention
I've been merely reacting, or passively drifting through life (sleepwalking)
Rather than entering each day with focus, gratitude and attentiveness

When I get into this kind of malaise where I passively go along w/the current
I start missing important things
I sit with my family at the dinner table, but I'm not really *present*
I have conversations on the phone with friends, but my mind is elsewhere
I'm there, but I'm not really there.

And the same thing can happen on Sunday mornings
We sit in my pew
We listen to the songs
We recite the prayers
We shake hands and greet folks when we're supposed to
We listen to the message
Sometimes we go down and bow a knee
And before we know it, the service is over and it's time to make our way out
We blink and the day is over and Monday is here again
And we are carried along by the swift current of another week

We've gone through the rhythm and the ritual of a worship service
But if we weren't paying attn, we may have missed the most important thing

The Barna group did a study of people in my generation
And they asked the question:
What is the most important reason for going to church?

7 of 10 of Millennials said it wasn't to see friends, hear practical teaching, music
It was to encounter God.

If our church meets in the most magnificent facility
And if we have a seat that's front and center
But we don't encounter God, we have nothing.

If we play the most glorious hymns and anthems
And if we are led by the most talented and inspiring vocalists
But we don't encounter God, it's just a clanging symbol.

If we listen to (or preach) the most eloquent and thoughtful sermons
And if we put our offering in the plate
But we don't encounter God, we gain nothing.

When I say "encounter God," I'm not talking about getting warm fuzzies
I'm not talking about getting goose bumps or getting an emotional rush
I'm talking about actively directing our attention to the living God
Talking to God, singing to God, listening to God

If we go thru the normal routine of a church service—or for that matter, our lives
But we haven't in any meaningful way engaged in dialogue w/God
We have only deprived ourselves

We need to press pause on this whole big Sunday morning routine
What are we doing if it's not coming for an encounter with God?
To unburden our hearts to God, to hear the truth from God
To be encouraged by God, to worship God— isn't this what we want?

This month we are focusing on the book of Psalms
Which is a collection of songs right in the middle of our Bible
And as we flip through the Psalms we see the full range of human emotion

Joy, rage, bitterness, disappointment, shame expressed through song
Appropriately, then, this series is called Mixtape
An exploration of this eclectic playlist of songs written 1000s of years ago

The Psalms have captured people for generation after generation
Because of the raw, unfiltered expression of emotion toward God within
When we talk about encountering God
In the Psalms, we see people truly pouring out their hearts
And engaging in conversation with God in ways that are both
Refreshingly and alarmingly transparent

Bono—the lead singer of U2 said:

“Why do we need the poetry of the Psalms? Because the only way we can approach God is if we’re honest through metaphor, through symbol. So, art becomes essential, not decorative, not as an adjunct, but actually as a way... we are changed.” - Bono

This morning we read from Psalm 5

This is a Psalm of David

We don’t know the exact context or the occasion in which he wrote this
But he was feeling overwhelmed with opposition
He felt like people were out to get him everywhere he looked
We know this happened numerous times during his reign as king
Like when his son Absalom rebelled and tried to depose him as king

And I like to picture that early one morning

David snuck away from the trappings of his kingly palace
And hid himself underneath a tree like he would have done
Back when he was a shepherd
And he poured out these words to God, like he was writing in a journal
He was lonely, desperate for help and counting on God to come through
He hadn’t slept that night—tossing & turning, afraid of what was coming
Do you have that picture in your mind?

Psalm 5

Pew Bible pg. _____

Listen to my words, LORD, consider my lament. Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly. For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong; you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, LORD, detest. But I, by your great love, can come into your house; in reverence I bow down toward your holy temple. Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies— make your way straight before me. Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with malice. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they tell lies. Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you. But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

David's prayer begins with the repetitive request in v. 1:

Listen to my words, consider my lament (whining), hear my cry
"God, I'm coming to you for help"

David, the king, the one everyone else goes to for a bail out or rescue
Goes straight to God when he's in need
In this moment, he's not a king, he's not royalty
His stature in the eyes of others means nothing
He's a servant of the one true king of heaven on his knees, pleading for help

As the day begins, David doesn't bottle up his anxiety
He lays out his requests before God
AND THEN—this is huge—he waits with expectation that God will respond

When was the last time you truly unpacked the contents of your heart in prayer?
When was the last time you even acknowledged to yourself all that you were
thinking and feeling?

When we're always moving, moving, moving
And we don't pay attention to our inner life

We dam up what should be a steady flowing river of communication to God
And we end up feeling anxious, impatient, disengaged and yet overwhelmed

All the while, God's ear is ready to listen
And God's Spirit is ready to respond
David lays out his request and then he waits with expectation

In v.4, David appeals to the character of God
He's working out his theology
"If you're really a God of righteousness, who opposes
Injustice and cruelty and deceit and violence...
Shouldn't you be working against the bad guys and helping me out?"

In contrast to the violent, deceptive people that are challenging him on all sides
David reasons, "God, here I am, asking for help, bowing down in humility
Asking you to help me, to lead me, to correct me, to show me how to live."

David's prayer underscores one of the great formative and perplexing struggles
Of life: Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous struggle?
Why do bad things seem to happen to good people?

David is working through these struggles with God in prayer.
He's not speculating to himself, or sitting around & reasoning with friends
He's presenting the issue to God and asking him to do something about it

He concludes his prayer with one more set of contrasting requests:
First, may his enemies fall into the pit they've dug for themselves
May their wickedness cause their undoing
And second, may David be vindicated for trusting in God
"May those who love your name rejoice in you."

May God make it worth the while of those who love him to continue to do so.
May God truly help when people who trust him ask him to.

Many of us don't have the courage to talk to God like this
We think we need to edit our prayers, clean them up, polish them off

We tend to walk on egg shells in prayer
And here's David, stomping around, letting it all hang out

David is saying to God what many of us think but don't have the guts to express
And not only does God not scold him for saying what he really thinks
God ordains this—& other *way more out of line*—journal entries of David
To make their way into our Bible to guide many others in their prayers

For much of my adolescence
I thought that doubt and any range of negative emotions
Like David was experiencing here were not proper topics
For conversation with God

And it changed my life as an 18-year-old
To learn that God could really handle my honest prayers
That more than anything, he wanted me
Not the dressed up and on-my-best-behavior me I thought I had to present
He wanted me

If I had gone to the school of the Psalms to learn to pray
I certainly would have known better

The Psalms are intended to be for us both a *model* for prayer and a *means of prayer* [Seth- just use the bold part]

When the disciples came to Jesus and they asked him to teach them to pray
He didn't say, "Just say anything!"
He gave them a model—the Lord's Prayer

The Psalms show us numerous models, different ways to communicate with God
This Psalm we just read is called an imprecatory psalm
David's calling down justice on his enemies; he's asking God to get them!

I'll tell you: Some of us know what it means to have enemies
Enemies of our families, enemies in business, even national enemies
Until Christ returns to heal our world, enemies are part of our experience

David, here, gives us a model for praying about our enemies
And if we don't have enemies, we can pray on behalf of those who DO
Though, you know, there is one Enemy we all share
One that stands behind all the violence/injustice/deceit in all the world
And we can use the Psalms to guide us as we pray/plead w/God
To hasten the day when he brings down justice on our enemy the devil

So, here's an idea:

This week, take a Psalm, maybe Psalm 5.
One that resonates with you or with someone you care about.
Rewrite the Psalm in your own words.
Hold on to the general themes, but make the content fit your life
Let the Psalm model for you a way of unburdening your heart to God
And once you've written it, read it out loud, read it to God
Repeat it, put your heart into it, really pray those words.

The Psalms are supposed to be a model for us to learn how to pray and
And they're also a *means* of prayer
Prayers we can hide in our heart and use at will

We see throughout Jesus' life, and most clearly on the cross
That Jesus used the Psalms as a means of prayer
He quoted them like we quote songs we love that help us through life
On the cross he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He wasn't just saying that.
He was quoting Psalm 22!
When he didn't have the strength to pray his own words
He prayed the words of the Scripture

And while the song he quoted starts with "My God, my God..."
It ends with a bold confession that God is still in charge
He has NOT abandoned the one he loves
And through his suffering will bless all the nations of the earth

Jesus quoted Psalm as a means of prayer—to remind himself of the big picture

The Psalms are God's gift to us as both a model of prayer & as a means of prayer

What's it say to us that the largest book in our Bible
Is not primarily the words of God TO us
But the words of US to God?

Perhaps, more than anything, what it should say to us
Is that there are divine Ears
That are eager to listen
That there is a divine Heart
That empathizes with just how burdened down we can feel
That there is a divine Father
Who longs to be in relationship with his children
And wants us to know, he's right here.
He's ready to listen.

One of my favorite bands from the 90s – not a Xian group—captures this feeling:
“I could call you sacred or call you obscene
Call you faithless, call you anything
But I call and you listen, you listen, you listen.”

The Psalms remind us that we have a God who listens.

The goal of any sermon or worship song or liturgy or piece of art in the church
Is to help us to make a move toward the God who listens

In the Incarnation of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by the Father
God has made a move toward us
He's at work
He's inviting us to come close, so we should respond

This morning, will you make a move toward God?
Will you just talk to him?
Will you share with him what's been keeping you up at night?
Will you tell him what's filling you with joy these days?
And then, will you wait and see what he does next?