

# AM I STRENGTHENING MY SPIRITUAL ROOTS?

(Psalm 63)

Please turn to Psalm 63. We are in the second week of a three-week series on the devotional life.

I would like to start off with a parable this morning written by an unnamed pastor from across the pond:

Once upon a time there was a tree. It was a lovely-looking tree, shapely, strong, and stately. But appearances are not always to be trusted, and they were not in this case. For the tree knew inwardly that its massive strength was beginning to wane. When the wind was strong it had felt itself shaking ominously, and heard suspicious creaks. So, wisely, it [decided to do something about it]. With much effort it grew another branch or two, and then looked stronger and safer than ever. But when the next gale blew, there was a terrific snapping of roots. . . [If it wasn't] for the support of a friendly neighbor, it would have been flat on the ground. When the tree had recovered from the shock, it looked at its neighbor curiously. "Tell me," it asked, "how is it that you have not only stood your ground, but are even able to help me, too?" "Oh," replied the neighbor, "that's easy. When you were busy growing new branches, I was strengthening my roots."

That parable reminds me of the parable the Lord shared about the wise and foolish builders (good or bad foundations).

They both built. They both expended energy, time, and money. But when the houses were tested by stormy weather, one stood and the other fell.

Good roots are to a tree what a good foundation is to a house. And the strong tree in our parable said to the fragile tree:

*"When you were busy growing new branches, I was strengthening my roots."*

The question I would like to ask you through the message this morning is this: "Spiritually speaking, are you "growing branches" so that you will look more spiritual to others, or are you truly strengthening your roots?"

**Title:** Are You Strengthening Your Spiritual Roots?

(Prayer)

Zack Eswine is a Christian author that was trying to do too many things and this made those around him nervous.

His mentor named Bill said to him: *"Zack, your life is like a five-alarm fire. You are coming and going in so many directions. I worry about you."*

Later, his boss said to him: *"You are doing so many different things ... We are afraid you are going to burn out."*

Two colleagues of his invited him to lunch. Another called on the phone. "We are worried about you," they said.

All of this advice finally got ahold of him when he received a snail mail letter from his mom. He said he could hear her voice as he read her words that said: "Son, a tree has to have roots to provide shade."

This is true for every one of us. If we are going to bless others and provide "shade" for them, it will not happen unless we are putting down roots into God's Word, prayer, fellowship, and the breaking of bread.

This morning, I want to give you four ways God motivates us to walk closely to Him. How do we obtain a greater desire to put down truly deep roots for God? First of all...

### **The desire for a devotional life. . .**

#### **1) Comes from positive assurance**

*"O God You are my God. . ." (Psalm 63:1)*

Being sure of your salvation — being 100% sure that your sins are forgiven and that you are a child of God — is essential to a life of devotion to Him. If you wonder if God is really your Father, it will be extremely difficult to want to spend time with Him. Those who aren't sure they are children of God will spend their lives saying thing like: "Why should I spend time in prayer and in the Word? How can I pray, 'Our Father. . .' when I am not really sure that He is my Father?"

A man once came to evangelist D. L. Moody and said he was worried because he didn't feel saved. Moody asked, "Was Noah safe in the ark?" "Certainly he was," the man replied. "Well, what made him safe, his feelings or the ark?" The inquirer got the point. (Comments)

### **The desire for a devotional life. . .**

#### **1) Comes from positive assurance**

#### **2) Comes from personal need**

*O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)*

It could be that King David was on the run because of death threats. Or David may have been referring to his own closeness to God (or maybe both)! But whatever was happening, he was in a dry and

thirsty place in his life and it caused him to hunger and thirst for God.

First, we saw that the positive 100% assurance that God Himself is essential as a basis for seeking God, but trouble and adversity is another strong motivation as well. One time, a doctor said to a patient:

**Doctor to patient:** "I have bad news and worse news."

**Patient:** "Ok. Let me have it!"

**Doctor:** "The bad news is that you only have 24 hours to live."

**Patient:** "I can't imagine what could be worse than that!"

**Doctor:** "I meant to tell you yesterday."

Trouble has a way of driving us to the throne of God.

**Hosea 5:15 (NLT)-----** *Then I [God] will return to my place until they admit their guilt and turn to me. For as soon as trouble comes, they will earnestly search for me."*

**Psalms 78:34-35** *When He slew them, then they sought Him; and they returned and sought earnestly for God. Then they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer.*

**Many years ago, former head coach of the Green Bay Packers** Mike Holmgren said the following about a really painful time in his life when he was cut from the New York Jets as the backup quarterback to Joe Namath. Holmgren said:

*"I [became a believer in] Christ when I was 11, but in my pursuit to make a name for myself in football, I left God next to my dust-covered Bible. But after getting cut from the Jets, I pulled out my Bible and found comfort in a verse I had memorized in Sunday school: 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths' (Proverbs 3:5-6). I asked Jesus Christ to take control again. My priorities in life are faith, family, and football--in that order."*

**The desire for a devotional life. . .**

- 1) **Comes from positive assurance**
- 2) **Comes from personal need**
- 3) **Comes from past experience**

*Psalm 63:2 I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory.*

When David was forced to live in the desert, he thought about home. He thought about the temple. He thought about that place where he had personally witnessed God's power and glory — where he had seen it right before his eyes — and he said,

*“Lord, I am so thirsty for You here. I remember better days. I remember when I was close to You. I remember what it was like to see Your power and glory. And my flesh — my whole body — longs for you!”*

A desire to see God's power and glory again is a great motivator.

If you can remember a time when you were more dedicated to God and more thirsty for God than you are today, you need to ask God to make you thirsty again.

Larry Crabb said, “The core problem is not that we are too passionate about bad things, but that we are not passionate enough about good things.”

Very convictingly, Tim Hansel said: “We don't need ‘fasten your seat belt’ signs in our pews because we no longer fly. We're like a group of geese attending meetings every Sunday where we talk passionately about flying and then get up and walk home.”

#### **4) Comes from personal obedience**

Psalm 27:8-----When You said, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You, “Your face, LORD, I will seek.”

In his book, *Out of the Blue*, former Dodgers pitcher Orel Hershiser described an encounter with manager Tommy Lasorda that changed his life. Lasorda called Hershiser into the office and shouted,

*“You don't believe in yourself! You're scared to pitch in the big leagues! Who do you think these hitters are, Babe Ruth? Ruth's dead! You've got good stuff. If you didn't, I wouldn't have hired you.” Lasorda continued: “I've seen guys come and go, son, and you've got it! Be aggressive. Be a bulldog out there. That's gonna be your new name: Bulldog. With that name, you'll scare the batters to death! Starting today, I want you to believe you are the best pitcher in baseball. Look at that hitter and say, ‘There's no way you can ever hit me.’”*

Two days later Orel pitched relief and in three innings, he gave up only one run. Lasorda's talk (he calls it his “Sermon on the Mound”) had worked. Many sportswriters believe Hershiser was the best pitcher from 1984-1988. One time during that six year stretch he pitched 59 consecutive innings

without giving up a run! (and won a world Series as well!) (And BTW, he is on the ballot for the first time this year as a candidate for the MLB Hall of Fame---voting is Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>.)

**Allow me to close** this morning by saying this: maybe you've lost your desire for God and the things of God. Maybe your devotion to Him is not what it ought to be. Maybe you haven't read His Word or personally shared the gospel with someone in a long time.

I hope today's message was a wake-up call to you. Just like Tommy Lasorda motivated Orel Hershisser, our Lord is not just speaking to you, HE'S SHOUTING!

*"Starting today, I want you to believe that you can become the follower of Mine you've always wanted to be! You've got great stuff! You've got My presence and My promises! You were once called darkness and now you are light in the Lord. Today, I want you to believe that by My grace and with My help, nothing is gonna keep you from becoming a Bible-reading, faith-sharing, prayer warrior of a Christian!"*

Will you start strengthening your roots as never before?