

FINDING THE RIVER THAT
NEVER RUNS DRY

Part 4 of 4: *HOW TO KEEP DRINKING THE WATER OF LIFE*

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Resources For Christ-Centered Discipleship

One morning in my quiet time I read Psalm 46 and noticed something I had never noticed before in verses 4-5. Psalms 46:4-5 says: *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.*

The thing that stood out to me was the fact that as far as I knew Jerusalem, the city of God, doesn't have a river that runs through it and it never has!

Jerusalem's water supply has always presented problems. Apart from Bir-Eyyub, a well, there is only the virgin's spring, which is connected by an aqueduct with the pool of Siloam. There are and have been other reservoirs such as Bethesda in NT times and the Mamilla Pool today, but they all depend on the rains or the aqueducts to fill them.

The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Tyndal, Vol. 2 p. 753

So what is the river? Hebrew poetic structure and parallelism gives us the answer in verse 5! God is in her midst. The river is a metaphor for God's life giving presence. God is within Jerusalem. He dwells in her midst and His presence is like life-giving rivers, the streams of which nourishes and satisfy and make glad the people of the city of God.

As I meditated on Psalm 46 those verses really spoke to me. I realized that this was a picture of my life (and yours also of course). God in me is a flowing river of life. Some people might have looked at Jerusalem and failed to see her river. Some of the people of Jerusalem didn't understand or believe in her river of life, but there was a river! God was in her midst and the same is true for us today.

This month we've talked about how the presence of Christ, through the gospel, provides a river of life that springs up from within every believer's life and flows through that person as a source of life and of joy.

We've discussed:

1. Discovering The River of Living Water.
2. How To Stop Digging Broken Cisterns (Repentance)
3. How To Start Drinking The Living Water (Faith)
4. How To Keep Coming To The One True River For The Water Of Life

We need to learn how to maintain ongoing spiritual renewal.

Practice the presence of Christ

The practice of the Presence is simply the discipline of calling to mind the truth that Christ is with us. When we consistently do this, the gift of seeing by faith is given. We begin to see with the eyes of our hearts.

Ephesians 3:14-19 contains a powerful prayer. *For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and*

deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

At the center of this God inspired prayer is the desire that we know the reality of the presence of Christ in our hearts. In verse 17 He says "I pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." The basis for this prayer is the fact that Jesus Christ literally lives in the heart of every believer. This doesn't mean that we treasure His Word, and think fond thoughts of Him. It means that He, being nothing less than God Almighty, having risen from the dead, dwells in the heart of every believer. What Paul is praying for here is that we might be aware of that.

Colossians 1:27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

What a powerful difference it would make in your life if you knew and believed that Christ is with you all the time!

Deepen your intimacy with God by learning to listen to Him

John 10: 14-15 & 27 "I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me--¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Christ is the good shepherd. He is ready, willing, and able to lead us to good places. The true Christian life is a life led by God. But in order to be led you have to listen to His voice.

On the evening before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples that although he was leaving them physically, he would not abandon them, but that He would come to them. How would He do this? Though the Holy Spirit. In fact Jesus said:

John 16:7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

It was good that he would go so that the Holy Spirit could come and be the means by which he literally indwelt them.

In verses 12-13 he went on to say; *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

What actions words are used in John 16: 12-13? The Holy Spirit will guide, He will speak, and He will tell.

We can be sure that this "coming" of the Son and the Father to the believing heart to be at home there involves conscious communication or conversation. The Spirit that inhabits us is neither unable nor unwilling to speak and communicate with us. Communication is the essence of his indwelling!

He is with us and he speaks with us, and we with him. He speaks with us in our heart, which burns from the characteristic impact of his word. His presence with us is, of course, much greater than his words to us. But this presence is turned into companionship only by the actual communications between him and us, which frequently are confirmed by external events as life moves along. This companionship with Jesus is the form that Christian spirituality takes as

practiced through the ages. Spiritual persons are not those who engage in certain "spiritual practices," but those who draw their life from a conversational relationship with God.

-- Dallas Willard, In Search Of Guidance pp. 450 & 239

It is important that we get still to wait on God and it is best that we get alone, preferably with our Bible outspread before us. Then if we will, we may draw near to God and begin to hear Him speak to us in our hearts. I believe that much of our religious unbelief is due to a wrong conception of and a wrong feeling for the Scriptures of Truth. A silent God suddenly began to speak in a book and when the book was finished lapsed back into silence again forever. Now we read the book as a record of what God said when He was for a brief time in a speaking mood. With notions like that in our heads how can we believe? -- A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God pp 81-82

Be Spiritually Receptive

For many years my fear of being, or even seeming foolish, gullible, and emotional kept me from drinking from God's fountain of living water. During that time I thought that people who said God spoke to them were flakey, dangerous, or both. As far as I was concerned we had the written word of God the Bible. We could study and cherish the words of Jesus and the other Bible writers, the apostles and the prophets and we had a comprehensive manual for living life and that was all we needed.

I talked about a personal relationship with Christ but for the life of me I don't know what I thought was personal or relational about it. I was treasuring the words of the Bible and trying to live according to it, but if I was sitting in a worship service and sensed my heart opening up to God and real feelings of joy, or adoration, or conviction of sin I would have thought I was getting emotional. I would not have thought that I was having a true spiritual encounter with the Christ of my heart and the Spirit of God!

No wonder the presence of Christ wasn't much comfort to me. Whenever I sensed what I might have experienced as the presence of Christ I shook it off as an emotional experience of little real value. No wonder my hungry soul had to find comfort in people and achievements. Christ was manifesting his presence in my heart, speaking, guiding, reassuring, and I was so busy talking to myself I couldn't even hear the voice of God and when I heard His still small voice I dismissed it as the unreliable murmurings of my own imagination!

In His excellent book In Search Of Guidance, Dallas Willard writes about the very problem I had.

God's spiritual invasions into human life seem, by their very gentleness, almost to invite us to explain them away.... Progress toward becoming a spiritually competent person finds its greatest hindrance in the ease with which the movements of God toward us can be explained away. The movements go meekly, without much protest.

God wants to be wanted and to be sufficiently wanted that we are ready, predisposed, to find him present with us. And if, by contrast, we are ready and set to find ways of explaining away his gentle presence, he will rarely respond with fire from heaven. More likely, he will simply leave us alone. We shall have our self-satisfaction that we were not so "gullible" as to respond to his soft call.

The test of character that lies in the gentleness of God's approach is especially dangerous for those formed by ideas that dominate our modern world. We live in a culture that has for centuries cultivated the idea that the skeptical person is always smarter than the one who believes. No

matter that you can be almost as stupid as a cabbage and still doubt. The fashion of the age has identified mental sharpness with a pose, not with genuine intellectual method and character.

Thus, only a very hardy individualist or social rebel, or one desperate for another life, stands any chance of discovering the substantiality of the spiritual. Today it is the skeptics who are the social conformists, though because of powerful intellectual propaganda they continue to enjoy thinking of themselves as wildly individualistic and unbearably bright. Partly as a result of this social force toward skepticism, which remains very powerful when we step into Christian congregations and schools for ministers, very few people ever develop competence in the life of prayer....

Nearly all areas of life in which we could become spiritually competent-including divine guidance confront us with the same type of challenge.

These areas all require of us a choice to be a spiritual person, to live a spiritual life.

-- Dallas Willard In Search Of Guidance, pp 235-236

Christ can offer you very little real sense of his love and presence because if He speaks to you or moves in you, you simply do not believe it is Him, or real, or of value.

If we do not turn from the sterility of skepticism and open our heart up to the influences of the Spirit of God we will not be able to draw water from the river of life.

Live a lifestyle of repentance and faith.

One day I was feeling alone, right or wrong that was how I was feeling, sort of alone, discouraged and unhappy. And God used the familiar words of Isaiah 53 to show me that in my feelings of loneliness' and sadness I was really sinning against my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What God showed me was that if I believed what I said believed to be true that Christ was with me and in me then I must count His presence in my heart and life of very small value, I must hold Him in very-low esteem to feel the way I felt.

In Isaiah 53 there is a description of how the people in Jesus day responded to Christ. I had never read those verses as a description of how, in spite of all I claimed to believe, I was treating the presence of Christ within me.

Isaiah 53:3 *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Isaiah 53:2 says of Christ.... *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

The brutal truth was I was acting as if there was no beauty or majesty in my view of Christ to attract me to Him or to create any desire for Him. Verse 3 said; *He was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not.*

I realized that it was as if I had my best friend right by my side and I so despised and rejected the strength and comfort and encouragement of His friendship that it was as if he meant nothing to me. I esteemed him not.

I was not that different than the people in Jesus' day that treated Him with contempt. I was acting as if, in terms of any real joy, strength, comfort, and encouragement, it meant next to nothing to my true state of mind that Christ lived in me and was closer than my own heartbeat! It was for me one of those moments when you realize that you have been a fool and there is nothing to do but repent of your sinful foolishness.

There is a powerful passage in John chapter 6:35 where Jesus says; *Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.* Then in verse 6; *But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.*

That statement comes after chapter after chapter telling the story of how Christ came as God in human flesh, a gift of God's love for the redemption of the world, and yet mankind as a whole loved darkness rather than light and treated God incarnate with contempt.

All of this leads up to Jesus saying in John 6:35, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."* The next verse emphasizes the sad response that he received: *But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.* They had seen but refused to believe in spite of the very presence of the Son of God.

Do you see the point? When Christ is not enough with us, when our peace and joy and love and strength is not found in Christ but in the circumstances of life we are proving that our hearts are filled with unbelief that despises the true value of the priceless gift of the presence of Jesus Christ in our hearts by the amazing grace of God. We despise Him and esteem him not. We do not believe that he is the bread of life! That He who comes to Christ will never go hungry, and he who believes in Christ will never be thirsty.

We need to repent and believe - believe the truth of the presence of Christ in our hearts as the spring of living water and the bread of life. You can tell when you really believe because you feel enriched and it affects your relationships with people and your reactions to circumstances.

If someone picks your pocket of a hundred dollars and you have a billion in the bank it's like a prick of a finger. If you've got 200 dollars to you name and someone steals a hundred dollars it is like a knife in the heart. It's the same crime but one is felt like a prick in the finger and the other like a knife in the heart.

Now imagine two people. They are both Christians and they are both in situations where they are being criticized. As you watch and listen is clear that one person is able to listen and sort through the criticism, think about it, and admit to what is true and kindly and patiently explain the areas where maybe the criticism is unfair. You can tell that the criticism he's receiving is no more than a little irritation, a prick in the finger. Why? Because that person believing in the truth of God knows how rich he is in the Father's love because of his faith in Jesus Christ.

You see another person faces the same kind of criticism and they are angry. They hate criticism and so they shift the blame or spiral into a sort of unhealthy self-hatred. It's clear that what they are experiencing is not a prick in the finger it is like a knife in the heart. Why? Because they do not believe the truth about God's love and the riches of grace they have in Him. There is a kind of humility that comes from believing the truth about the overflowing wealth of God's love that is ours through Jesus Christ.

When we believe in the gospel people can still hurt us, but they cannot dominate us and we cannot disregard them. When we see and believe how deeply Christ loves us in spite of our

many flaws and how fully he can fulfill us we are liberated not only to get along with others, but also to love them in Christ. A lot of people know all the right answers but it's not real to them. A lot of us are like that. That's why we need to repent all over again and believe the gospel as it relates to every area of life.

There are two ways to believe something. I heard a story a man told about a friend he was visiting. They were driving somewhere and this friend wasn't wearing his seat belt. So the man mentioned this to his friend. He said, "Uh, you know the statistics don't you, you really should drive with a seat belt." His friend just shrugged him off. About a year later they got together again and he noticed that his friend put his seat belt on when he got in the car. So he said something like this: "Wow, now you're wearing your seat belt, how come?" His friend said: "well, I visited a man I know who was in a car accident. He didn't have his seat belt on. He went right through the windshield and had about a hundred and twelve stitches in his face and now I always wear my seat belt." So the man who was telling the story says to his friend: "Are you saying you didn't really believe in seat belts before?" And the man said something very interesting and very human. "Well I did believe it but I didn't believe it. I believed it but I wasn't effected by it. I didn't get any new information when I saw my friend all stitched up in the hospital, but all the information became sort of new to me.

You see it's one thing to believe that Jesus Christ completed the work of your redemption and salvation on the cross and because of his unfailing love he really is the water and the bread of life for you but it's another thing to really believe it in a way that it affects you and transforms you.

Do you believe?

John 7:38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him