

Introduction

In 1893, Francis Thompson published what came to be one of the most influential religious poems in history, *The Hound of Heaven*. That poem pictures God pursuing each of us as a hound pursues a hare, persistently and patiently, seeking to draw us into relationship with Him.

Today though, I'm going to "turn the tables" so to speak. That poem speaks about God as the Hound of Heaven pursuing us. But I'm going to preach about we as hounds of earth pursuing Him. That's what King David was in Psalm 63:1-8 and what we should be as well.

The title of this Psalm tells us where David was when he wrote it. He was in the wilderness of Judah, which the last line in verse 1 describes as parched and cheerless. 2 Samuel 15-16 recounts what he was doing there. He was fleeing from Absalom, his son, who had dethroned him and was attempting to kill him.

It was one of the worst times in David's life. But thankfully for us, it drove Him to pursue God and to tell us about it in Psalm 63.

A Sense of God's Presence

Let's start with the Psalm's very first words, "**O God, You are my God.**" "**My**" is a pronoun that personalizes things. *Yahoo*, for instance, advertises *My Yahoo*, which personalizes our home page. That's exactly what the pronoun "**my**" before the noun "**God**" in verse 1 does. It personalizes Him to us. He was David's God. He is my God. He is your God. That reveals the most staggering fact of our existence. We can have a personal relationship with the dominant reality of the universe, the One who made it, God. That relationship involves two things.

The first is found in verse 7. David uses a lovely metaphor here, "**the shadow of Your wings.**" There are 12 references in the Bible to God's "**shadow**," which represents His invisible but very real presence. He is with us always and everywhere, just as our shadow is. David writes

about that in verse 7 that, "**I sing for joy.**" God's presence gives him joy and there's only one reason it can - because He senses it.

That reveals the first thing relationship with God involves – a sense of His presence. We have a strong feeling or impression of Him being with and in us.

So called "smart" weapons of warfare are a good analogy here. Some of those weapons are so "smart" that they're actually able to detect being watched by radar. So, the F-15 fighter pilot knows that someone is watching or tracking his plane. Weapons that aren't "smart," however, aren't able to detect being watched by radar. They don't know that someone is watching or tracking them.

It's like that with people and God. God is with them always and everywhere. He's listening to and looking at everything they say and do. But most don't sense that. They're like "non-smart" weapons that don't detect being watched or tracked. Some, however, do sense that. They're like "smart" weapons that do detect being watched or tracked. They have a strong feeling or impression of He being with and in them.

Five days a week, I have a cup of Sugar Smacks early in the morning around a little island in our kitchen. Objectively, I'm not alone. God is right there with me around that island. Subjectively, I rarely feel alone. I usually sense God's presence there as strongly as I do my wife's presence when we're in the same room together.

Interplay with God

Relationship with God involves a second thing, in verse 8. In the first line, we do something – cling to God. In the second line, He does something – upholds us. What we have here is what commentator Derek Kidner calls "**divine-human interplay.**"

Interplay is the essence of relationship isn't it. In my relationship with my wife, for instance, I speak and listen *to* her and she speaks and listens *to* me. And I act *in relation to* her and she acts *in relation to* me. We're deeply involved in each other's lives so that there's constant

interplay, interaction, between us.

It's the same, or at least can be, with God and us.

"The Lord told me to share the gospel with a friend of mine."
"God said that I need to quit being so sensitive." **"The Holy Spirit led me to this church."** Those are all things that I've heard Christians say and I believe them. The Lord did *tell*. God did *say*. The Holy Spirit did *lead*. God does speak to us.

On April 25, I preached a sermon titled *A Hell to Shun* that the Holy Spirit definitely assisted me in preparing. Or I used to have a desire for admiration and praise that I don't have now because the Holy Spirit removed it from me. My analysis is a correct one. God did *assist* me in preparing that sermon and did *remove* that desire from me. God does act in relation to us.

Those things illustrate that in our relationship with God, we speak and listen *to* Him and He speaks and listens *to* us. And we act *in relation to* Him and He acts *in relation to* us. We're deeply involved in each other's lives so that there's constant interplay, interaction, between us.

That then is what a personal relationship with God involves: a strong sense of His presence and constant interplay with Him.

Now that we know what a personal relationship with God is, let's take a look at what it requires of us. It's three things.

Value

The first, in verse 3, is that we must value God and what He offers.

Notice the words **"lovingkindness"** and **"life"** in this verse. The word **"lovingkindness"** represents what God offers. The word **"life"** represents what the world offers. Now, what God offers is invisible and subtle. In contrast, what the world offers is visible and vivid. Most people, therefore, are drawn far more strongly to the latter than the former. That explains why, for instance, most people rise in the morning far hungrier for bacon and eggs than they are for God.

But while the world and what it offers are visible and vivid, God and

what He offers are far more valuable. David's assessment in verse 3 makes that perfectly clear. He says that God and what He offers are "**better**" than the world and what it offers.

How does he know that? The words "**have seen**" and "**To see**" in verse 2 tell us. It's because He examined the true nature of both. He gave detailed analysis and thought to both – and so should we.

I did that in last week's sermon, for example. I examined the nature of what the world offers, peoples' admiration and praise. I also examined the nature of what God offers, His admiration and praise. People's is short-lived and unaffecting. His is enriching inwardly and enhancing outwardly. Knowing that, I value God's admiration and praise far more than I do people's.

Or examine the nature of what the world offers, friendship with people. Also examine the nature of what God offers, friendship with Jesus. Because they're flesh and blood, people don't have the capacity to care for us in our depths. They can't enter into the core of our being and touch us there. They can't be with us in finality no matter how much they love us. But Jesus, just because He's spiritual, can. Knowing that, I value friendship with Jesus far more than friendship with people.

Those two examples show that anyone who objectively examines them will conclude what David did in verse 3. God and what He offers are far more valuable than the world and what it offers.

That then is the first thing that having a personal relationship with God requires. We must value Him and what He offers the most.

Desire

Doing so naturally leads to the second thing it requires, desire. What we value the most, we desire the most.

Look at the second and third lines of verse 1. David uses two words here, "**soul**" and "**flesh**." Those two words together represent the whole being of a person. Notice what he writes about that. With his whole being, he "**thirsts**" and "**yearns**" for God. Those are strong words

aren't they and teach us this. We must desperately desire God.

A young man named Siddhartha wanted to find God but didn't know how. So he went to a wise old sage in a mountain retreat, whom he heard could tell him. After talking with Siddhartha and discovering what he wanted, the sage took him to the edge of a lake where they sat down and talked some more. Suddenly, he grabbed Siddhartha by the throat, plunged his head in the water, and held him there. Siddhartha tried desperately to escape the sage's iron grip but to no avail. Finally, exhausted from the struggle, he gave up to die. But then the sage pulled him out of the water just as suddenly as he had plunged him in it. Siddhartha immediately gasped for breath and finally got himself under control. Whereupon he began to protest angrily but the sage raised his hand and silenced him as he did. **"When you want God as desperately as you have just wanted breath,"** he firmly instructed, **"Then, and only then, will you find Him."**

He was right. That's what verse 1 conveys. We must want God as desperately as a drowning man wants breath.

We must want that because desire is the source of action. If we desire something badly enough, we'll take whatever action is necessary to achieve or experience it. If we don't desire it badly enough, we won't. That's especially true of having a personal relationship with God. If we desperately desire Him, we'll do whatever it takes to have that. If we don't desperately desire Him, we won't. It's as simple as that.

Pursue

"Whatever it takes" is found in verse 1. David declares, **"I shall seek you earnestly."** That's the third thing that relationship with God requires. We must seek Him earnestly or as I'd say it, pursue Him hotly.

The words David uses to describe his pursuit reveal how we do that: **"lips"** in verse 3, **"hands"** in verse 4, **"mouth"** in verse 5, and **"remember"** and **"meditate"** in verse 6. Those words teach us how to hotly pursue God. We purposely and persistently direct our minds and

bodies, our thoughts and actions, to Him.

David did that in a variety of ways, several of which he identifies: praising Him (verses 3 and 5), worshipping Him (verse 4a), praying (verse 4b), and thinking about Him (verse 6). There are other ways including giving thanks, studying, practicing solitude and silence, serving, and fasting. We hotly pursue God by learning how to do all of those things and then doing them, as wholeheartedly and steadily as we can.

Let's take verse 6 as an example of what I mean. One of the ways we hotly pursue God is by thinking about Him. Doing that requires two things. First, build a detailed and accurate vision of Him. I've written a study titled *The First Aim* to help us do that. Second, use that vision to bring Him constantly before our minds.

I have done the first thing and am doing the second. So I think of his self-existence when I eat dinner, of His joy when I see children play, of his eternity when I hear clocks chime, of His grace when I pet dogs, and on it goes. Like David in verse 6, the first thing I think about when I get up and the last thing I think about when I go to bed is God. And when my mind isn't necessarily occupied, I think about Him more than anything else in between, including my wife, children, or grandchildren. I think about Him more than I do them.

That illustrates how to hotly pursue God. We learn how to direct our minds and bodies to Him. We then wholeheartedly and steadily do just that.

Conclusion

I'd like to close by asking you what is perhaps the most revealing question you can ask and answer. What is it that you value, desire, and pursue the most? The honest answer to that question speaks volumes about you. I don't know what your answer is, but I do know what it should be, "**God.**" Greatly value, desperately desire, and hotly pursue Him. As He is the Hound of Heaven pursuing you, be a hound of earth pursuing Him. You'll find Him, and the satisfaction of verse 5, if you do.