

## **What Is Your Heart Set On? (Psalm 84)**

### ***Summary***

There is so much more to life than our singleness! This 10-part devotional on Psalm 84 asks what your heart is set on, and recognises that we have a choice to either dwell in God's house or live in tents of wickedness. It elevates the goodness and faithfulness of God, and implores singles to accept that no good thing does God withhold from his children.

### **Day 1: Cry Out!**

*“How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” (84:1-2)*

What is your heart set on? As singles, we often yearn for anything and everything more than we desire God's presence in our lives day-to-day.

More often than not, we need to be reminded that God's dwelling place is lovely; that He is better than everything we can see. What we need most is not a relationship or a spouse or a new job or to own a house or a car or the latest iPhone. The Psalmist encourages us to submit our hearts so that our bodies cry out for God more than they seek the satisfaction of our emotional and physical needs.

God has written eternity on our hearts so that every soul, heart and flesh is drawn to Him. The reality is that life with God is better than life without Him. There is immeasurable joy to be found in God's dwelling place. In fact, it is the only place we are able to find safety, certainty and hope for our discontented, anxious hearts.

Maybe the idea of dwelling with God doesn't feel lovely to you. Perhaps you feel angry with God, feel abandoned by Him, or are struggling to believe that God has really forgiven you for things you have said or done. Take a moment to cry out to the living God; He hears every one of your cries. 1 John 5:14 says *“this is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”* Pray that you would believe God's dwelling place is lovely, and ask that your soul might yearn for Him above everything else.

**Day 2: Gold-plated love.**

*“Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young – a place near your altar, LORD Almighty, my King and my God.” (84:3)*

Love is a concept that seems to elude humans across the globe. Increasingly as a society we are settling for counterfeits left, right and centre. This verse promotes a picture of motherly, tender care, provision, affection and proximity to God. His provision is perfect for all our needs. It will always be more than adequate, and it will always cause us to draw nearer to God.

The Psalmist compares us to sparrows. Jesus used the juxtaposition of believers with sparrows to demonstrate how much we are loved by God (see Matt 10:29). Surely if God provides for the sparrows, He will provide so much more for His children!?

God’s love is the gold-plated standard for all of our relationships. We know He loves us because He has told us, He has shown us, and He has given us others to remind us. John 15:5 says *“I am the vine, you are the branches”*. It is easy to feel forgotten and forsaken as a single person – the cry of our hearts is often against our lot, to the tune of *“I want a different nest”*. God has a bespoke plan for you and for your life. Sanctification for you will look different than someone else, but we can cling to this promise that God has reserved a place for you near to His altar so that you can sit at His feet and worship Him. Give thanks for His mercy, His provision, and His love.

While you are waiting for God to shake things up, pray for your future spouse, that He would teach you both more about His sacrificial love, that you would both be branches connected to the true vine. Pray that you would desire to be near God’s altar and sit at His feet come what may.

**Day 3: God is not focused on your relationship status!**

*“Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are even praising you. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever praising you!” (84:4)*

Has your inner monologue ever been, “I don’t feel blessed”? As if marriage is the ultimate blessing, or the only way God can prove His faithfulness to His children.

It is entirely reasonable that we should tire of hearing the phrase “God is preparing you in your singleness”. While this may be true, God isn’t focused on our relationship status. He aims to prepare us to dwell in His house. God’s priority is taking us to the New Creation and equipping our hearts to praise Him forever. God may or may not be preparing you for marriage but He has promised to make you fit for heaven. The peace we have through Christ is the greatest blessing of all.

Take a moment to praise God for all the tangible blessings He has given you. Start big and see how minute you can go!

It is not so much that your singleness is a blessing as that God has given you a specific commission and purpose for each day that is connected to the unique gifts and opportunities He has given you.

**Day 4: God gives us strength.**

*“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.” (84:5)*

Where is your strength? We can be so self-sufficient sometimes, we forget how much we need God’s help. His blessings are on standby, ready to be poured out, but our hearts are often turned away from God. 1 Peter 4:11b says *“if anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”* If, as Christians, our whole lives amount to an act of worship, we are called to live by God’s strength alone.

We need that strength to defeat our loneliness, feelings of abandonment or forsakenness, and to combat a fear of the future. The strength God supplies by His grace enables us to set our hearts on pilgrimage. It’s a tough gig being a Christian, but God gives us everything we need to journey on. Jude 24 is a huge encouragement: *“to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy.”*

A pilgrimage is a journey to a specific heavenly destination – on the road of life God is committed to doing more in us than we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20) to ensure that we can run the race of life marked out for us (Hebrews 12:1b). With every step we learn more of who we are and who God is making us. In our particular challenges, including singleness, we have to believe that God is able to meet our needs, that God is good, faithful, and our strength in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1).

**Day 5: Change my circumstances or change me?**

*“As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.” (84:6-7)*

Have you given up? Been driven to a place of despair? The Valley of Baca is a metaphor for the most difficult and painful seasons and experiences in life, where everything seems hopeless and you feel helpless. The way of the pilgrim is never a straight line from A to B. Christians are promised adversity and yet the abundant blessings God pours out on us along the way couldn't be more apparent.

Over and over again I have seen God change me before He changes my circumstances. I have had to learn to accept that there are some thorns that God will never remove from our lives. We so often equate the removal of our discomfort to being blessed by God. This might be why we feel forsaken. God likes to intervene in ways that draw our hearts nearer to Him. Here we see that God does this by coming alongside His people in the Valley of Baca, providing sustenance and encouragement along the way. The picture in verse 6 is one of bounty, of life, of fruitfulness. Just like we cannot have the rainbow unless we have the rain first, it is hard to appreciate the privilege of the presence of God unless our hearts are forced to adopt a posture of dependence.

How big is your view of God? Perhaps it is too small. *“Has the Lord's hand been shortened?”* (Isaiah 59:1) No, no, He hears every single one of your cries in the Valley of Baca. His response? *“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it”.* (1 Cor 10:13)

There is an enduring nature to the faithfulness of God. God ensures that whatever comes upon His people will not leave a lasting mark; it may wound, but it will not prevent Christians from seeing God face to face. Our destination is not the altar of marriage, it is the altar in Zion.

When you are tempted to say enough is enough, cry out to God even louder. Plead with him for the autumn rains, His grace is enduring, and He is the way forward. Trust Him. Wrestle

with all your might to seek His faithfulness and abundant blessings. Praise God for all the ways that He is working in your life today.

**Day 6: Let your heart rage!**

*“Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty; listen to me, God of Jacob.” (84:8)*

Hear my prayer. Listen to me.

This is the cry of a raging heart. A heart hurting with disappointment, anxiety, fear, anger, despair, resignation, and doubt. Pray your emotions. God wants to hear them. He can handle them; He knows what they are before you even open your mouth.

Wrestling with God in prayer always results in blessing. In Genesis 32:24, Jacob boldly wrestled in prayer and refused to let go until he received God’s blessing. It seems that the greatest blessing Jacob received in that moment was a deeper confidence in God, the removal of his fear for the future, a conviction that God was with Jacob and was not holding his past against him.

Let prayer, together with the Holy Spirit, infuse your desires. Don’t deny your circumstances. God sees all. He wants to change you before He changes your circumstances. Always. Rarely will we be able to make sense of it. But ask for patience and wisdom to see what God is doing in your life. Ask for discernment to keep in step with the Spirit. Remember that He is God and we are not.

As an aside, it is good to pray with others for both the small things and the big things. We are called to bear one another’s burdens and having partnership in prayer can be the difference between discouragement and encouragement. Even today, find a Christian friend or brother or sister who you can share a prayer request with and ideally meet to pray with one another about such things.

**Day 7: You have God's favour.**

*“Look on our shield, O God; look with favour on your anointed one.” (84:9)*

God is our shield because He knows we need armour to be protected from being tossed to and fro (Ephesians 4:11). The fullness of the armour of God is set out in Ephesians 6 and is prefaced on the assumption that we are susceptible to believing the lies of the devil. Ultimately God chooses to protect us because we are precious to Him.

When is the last time you sat down and considered how much you matter to God? Jesus has bought you at a price; He loves you more than you will ever know. He pays you special attention because He knows what is best for you. He goes before you. He puts His Spirit in you to help you; He blocks things that have no business being in your life, protects you from things that will hurt you, and picks you up when you get it wrong.

Psalm 18:19 says *“He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.”* In Psalm 18, David was in dire straits. He had acted in a way that should have resulted in God cutting him loose. Like David, the person we most often need to be rescued from is ourselves. But God redirects our hearts; He reconciles us to Himself. There is covenant love on display here: God delights in you because you are His child. Fact. Let's not forget that dating (like most of the rest of life) is an absolute minefield. In Jesus, He has forgiven you for every misstep you have made and will make in the future. Why not replace the *in you* with your name and say aloud that God delights in you until you believe it.

Remember that you have God's favour and seek to be close enough to Him so that He can act as your shield.

**Day 8: God’s way is always better, so much better!**

*“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.” (84:10)*

I don’t know how well you think your life is going to the plans you had for it. Perhaps you spend your days wishing things were different. Maybe you feel like everything would be perfect if you weren’t alone or had that one thing that your heart desires.

This verse reminds us that of all the things this world (and people in it!) can offer us, they pale into insignificance when compared to a single day in God’s house. It is natural to want instant gratification. A thousand days isn’t even a long time – a mere 2.7 years. We have all prayed for something and felt like it’s not worth waiting on God, or being convinced He is taking too long.

The Psalmist knows this – he has wrestled with God in prayer, he has been through the Valley of Baca, but he does not ignore God’s abundant kindness. His experience under the sun is what allows him to liken the greatness of the house of God to a place so regal and majestic that he would feel privileged even being a doorkeeper. For the Psalmist, God is better than instant gratification. There’s something wonderful about the delayed gratification so often experienced by Christians who have learned to wait on God.

There is, of course, an alternative. We can choose to dwell in wickedness. We are free to go after whatever we want without reference to God. But the gentleness of the (understated) truth in this verse is that it really is better to dwell with God than without him.

Years ago, my friend was in a difficult relationship that she knew she had no business being in. I sent her this verse right before she went on holiday with her partner because I wanted to remind her that her faith is a choice. God does not bully us into submission; he does not force us to obey Him. But by grace, when we do seek to obey Him, when we do allow Him to meet us where we are at, He gives us the faith to believe that life with Him will not disappoint us. He really is better, and one day lived with Him by your side is the best thing of all.

Why not commit to pursuing Him every day for the rest of your life right now!

**Day 9: God is not holding out on you.**

*“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favour and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” (84:11)*

This is a verse of two halves: God is our provider and our protector; even when we do not deserve it, He gives us what we need, ensuring that we receive the honour that comes with being a child of the King. But the Psalmist is also clear that *“no good thing does [the LORD] withhold from those whose walk is blameless”*. No good thing. To be fair, God has an unfair vantage point where He can see from the end to the beginning.

If I had a tenner for every time I felt like God was withholding something from me I would be a millionaire. Yet, the verse attributes the blessing to the person whose walk is blameless. It is clear that we need the Lord’s favour – without Jesus’s intervention, we would not be able to claim this blessing because on our own we are far from blameless. All the same, God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows what we need. One of the hardest things about faith is that we have to learn to surrender our deepest desires to God. We have to learn to trust that our circumstances are not an indictment. This verse encourages us that He is not withholding blessings from us.

There is a direct link between our needs and the timing of God’s blessings on our lives. However unpalatable it may feel from time to time, He is never early and never late. His provision is always right on time! Ask God for the patience and grace to waiting on Him as you discern His plans and purposes for your life.

**Day 10: You are blessed.**

“*LORD Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you.*” (84:12)

Control is easier than trust. There is less risk involved with control. But only God is ever in control. As people created by Him and for Him, we are called to trust Him.

It sounds straightforward – like a sort of *Just Do It* mantra. But you may have encountered lots of things that make it difficult for you to trust God or other people. You may have had a difficult childhood where your primary caregivers were unreliable or abandoned you. You might not have learned how to trust yourself. You might have experienced knock-backs in your faith or suffered disappointments that eclipsed your ability to believe that trusting God is something you want to risk again.

I have heard it said that faith and fear are opposite sides of the same coin. Note that there is not a hint of fear anywhere in this psalm. The Psalmist is reminding God’s people that they are blessed, regardless of circumstances; that blessing is a reward for when they set their hearts on God.

God is not our pawn to manipulate or throw our toys out of the pram at when we don’t get what we want exactly when we want it! Rather, God really is faithful, He really is good and He really is for you. God roots for you like a teammate, supports you like a father, embraces you like a mother, encourages you like a friend, corrects you like a teacher, treats you better than you deserve because He made the world and everything in it and He wants to.

So, we find ourselves back where we started. You may be single for another month, or another twenty years. You may get married and find yourself single again; you may never get married. But our Saviour is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The answer is not to look inward for answers; instead, seek more of God every day. Let Him be the one you worship, the one who gives us life and breath and everything (Acts 17:25).