



Week Three: Desperate

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.*

Psalm 42:1

Day 15: Introduction to Week 3

Committed. Generous. Gifted. Loving. Selfless. Encouraging. A student of God's Word. Full of faith.

Most followers of Christ would love to be described by others in any of these ways. But what if someone were to describe you as *desperate*?

Desperation typically has a negative connotation in our world. When we think about someone who is desperate, we likely think about someone who is needy. Incapable. Weak. Helpless. Hopeless.

Who wants to be thought of like that?

What we often fail to grasp, however, is that we *are* desperate. Apart from God, we *are* needy. We *are* incapable. We *are* weak and helpless and, yes, even hopeless.

We forget that, prior to coming to faith in Jesus, we were completely without hope, dead in our transgressions and sins, far away from God, and deserving of His wrath. We forget that we can only come to God through His great mercy and grace, rather than through any goodness or virtue of our own (Ephesians 2:1-13).

Here's the point. Even though all of us *are* desperately needy and hopeless apart from God, we all too frequently live or pretend as if we're not. We want people to see us as self-sufficient and capable, not desperate.

Is it possible, though, that God is simply waiting for you to fully accept and embrace your desperate condition and to stop leaning on your own understanding and resources, so that He can finally bring about the breakthrough in your life and in the church for which you've been waiting and hoping?

Group Video Discussion

Watch Video 3 Desperate

Your notes:

What keeps us from being more desperate for God?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Personal Response:

1. What did you hear?

2. How do you hope to respond?

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Talk about a season of life when you were desperate for help. Did you feel like you grew closer to God through that experience? Why or why not?
2. Do you feel the concept of being desperate for God is biblical? Why or why not?
3. In your own words, what does it mean to be desperate for God?
4. How might desperate prayer lead to spiritual breakthroughs?
5. Which of the three reasons for why we may not be more desperate for God (as discussed in the video) can you identify with the most?
6. Are there any additional reasons (not mentioned in the video) that you can think of as to why we're often not more desperate for God?
7. In what ways might prayer in desperate times help to ignite your faith?
8. After watching the video, what has God brought to your mind in terms of a next-step of application that you can take this week?

Personal Daily Devotions

Day 16

Spiritually Poor

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*
Matthew 5:3

It's hard to admit that we don't have it all together. It's hard to ask for help. It's hard to admit that there are things we don't know, don't understand, or can't do.

Nevertheless, today's verse is a good reminder that God looks with favor upon those who recognize their utter need for Him. The question is whether or not you're willing to admit it and to live accordingly. If so, that's what it means to be *poor in spirit*. It's another way of saying that you're *desperate*. It's to recognize that, because of your sin, you are spiritually and hopelessly bankrupt before God. It's to humbly confess, “God, without You, I can do nothing and I am nothing. All of my hope is in you.” And this verse teaches that it's only when you come to this realization and to this place of surrender that you are able to receive salvation (the kingdom of heaven) and to experience the spiritual riches that God offers to His children (Ephesians 1:3).

The reason why this matter is so important – particularly within the context of this study – is because there is a fundamental connection between desperation and prayer. Simply put, the more desperate (or poor in spirit) we realize we are, the more we will pray. And the more we pray and turn to God in desperation, the more we will come to know Him, to feel His presence, and possibly even begin to see Him bring about a breakthrough in our circumstances.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Are you ever reluctant to ask for help or to reveal weakness to others? Why is that?

How does recognition and acceptance of our desperate condition drive us to prayer?

How can you remind yourself this week of your desperate need for God?

Day 17

A Desperate Prayer

“The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, ‘God I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”

Luke 18:11-13

It’s easy to fall into the trap of just going through the motions of prayer. We get distracted, letting our minds wander, perhaps as we think about all of the things we need to do that day. And before we know it, prayer becomes just another routine. We forget what a privilege it is to pray. We forget that we’re talking to the sovereign God of the universe, and that He is more interested in our hearts as we pray than He is in our words. We forget just how desperate and helpless we are before Him.

The tax collector to whom Jesus referred in today’s theme verse, however, seemed to be keenly aware of his desperate condition. He didn’t appear to be going through the motions with God. He made no excuses and didn’t try to rationalize his sin. He didn’t try to justify himself by talking about how much more righteous he was compared to others. In his eyes he was deserving of judgment, so he threw himself on the mercy of God.

When was the last time you prayed with that type of desperation? When was the last time you pinned all of your hopes on God, humbly acknowledging that there’s no one and nowhere else to turn but to Him? Why not start today?

Your Personal Reflection and Application

How can you tell when you're just going through *the* motions of prayer?

Where do you see the separate attitudes and approaches of the Pharisee and the tax collector in today's Bible passage operating in your own life?

How does this story illustrate that spiritual desperation is not so much a conscious choice as it is an attitude that organically arises when we come to grips with the depth of our depravity and helplessness apart from God?

Day 18

Desperate for a Miracle

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed."

Mark 5:27-28

Mark didn't mention her name. We only know that she had a seemingly incurable disease. The nonstop bleeding she experienced would have likely made her anemic and exhausted. It also made her socially unacceptable and ceremonially unclean according to Jewish Law (Leviticus 15:25-27). Consequently, marriage and childbearing would have been next to impossible. Family and friends would have been required to stay away from her. She also wouldn't have been allowed to enter the temple, thus isolating her from the faith community and preventing her from being able to worship God publicly. And on top of these challenges, she had drained all of her financial resources in an effort to find a solution to her problem.

So she took desperate measures. Risking public humiliation and possibly even punishment, she reached out to touch Jesus as He passed by in the crowd. She simply believed that He could heal her. She'd seen or heard Him do it before. And God did for her in an instant what no doctor had been able to do in twelve years.

God is moved to action when we come to Him in faith and desperation as our best and only hope. You won't automatically be healed of every health problem or see a breakthrough in every circumstance just by having faith, but you will be transformed from the inside out and you will experience the peace of God like never before.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

If you read the entire account (Mark 5:24-34) you'll see that Jesus made the woman reveal herself. Why do you think He did that?

Why would God allow this woman to suffer for twelve years when He could have healed her from the beginning?

Have you ever been in such a dire situation that you felt like God was your only hope? What did that circumstance teach you about faith and about God?

Day 19

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Exodus 14:13-14

It's difficult to imagine a more desperate situation than the one in which the Israelites found themselves in Exodus 14. The Red Sea prevented them from being able to move forward. At the same time, the mighty Egyptian army – from whom the Israelites had just miraculously escaped after having endured 400 years of oppressive enslavement in Egypt – were now chasing after Israel and about to overtake them from behind.

Surrounded on all sides with no escape in sight, the Israelites were understandably terrified. So, Israel initially did what many of us do when we're caught in a desperate circumstance: they grumbled and complained to God (vv. 8-12).

God, however, supernaturally brought about Israel's deliverance by parting the waters of the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to pass through safely, while the Egyptian army drowned (vv. 21-29).

Why does God allow us to go through seemingly impossible circumstances like these? Often it's because He wants to get our attention. He wants our devotion. He wants our *desperation*. He wants us to learn to trust Him above anything or anyone else and to call out to Him in our time of need. Perhaps He's even placed you in a desperate situation right now so that He will be your only solution, so that you will be still, stop relying on your own timing and resources, and witness just how powerful and sufficient He is.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Can you identify with the Israelites in this story? If so, how?

What might it mean to “stand firm” and to “be still” (vv. 13-14) when you’re in a desperate circumstance?

How does God “fight” for us (v. 14)?

When the Israelites got to the other side of the Red Sea and realized the miraculous breakthrough that had just taken place, they gave thanks to God and worshiped Him (Exodus 15). Take a moment to tell God thank you for the times that He has been faithful and delivered you out of difficult circumstances.

Day 20

Hungry for God

*“As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for You, my God.”*

Psalm 42:1

It’s one thing to pray for God to come through for you when you’re in a desperate situation and need a miracle. It’s another thing, however, to be desperately hungry *for God Himself*.

Psalm 42 illustrates that spiritual desperation isn’t so much about wanting God to “show up” and to change your circumstances, as it is about already having a vibrant relationship with God – and longing for *more* of it. Spiritual desperation is about more than asking God to change your situation. It’s about asking God to actually change *you*. It’s about putting your total and complete hope in Him (vv. 5, 11), not in your own wisdom or strength. It’s about yearning and aching to know God more, to hear Him speak to you, and to personally feel His presence and witness His power in a fresh way.

Take a few minutes to read through Psalm 42.

Would you describe yourself as someone who is desperate for more of God? If not, what’s holding you back?

Let’s admit it. Most of us are not as hungry or as thirsty for God as we should be. But one of the great promises in the Bible is that God draws near to those who draw near to Him (James 4:8). Like the psalmist, express your utter dependence upon God in prayer and your earnest desire to know Him more today.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Is confessing your sin to other people and having them pray over you a regular part of your life? If not, What specific words or phrases do you see in Psalm 42 that describe the psalmist's hunger for God?

What is the difference between wanting something from God and wanting God Himself?

Take a moment and ask God to show you anything that is getting in the way of you being more desperate for Him. Write down anything that He lays on your heart.

Day 21

Application Day: Silence & Stillness

It can be challenging to find silence and solitude in our lives. Even when we sit down or lay in bed, our minds tend to stay active. It seems every part of our day is inundated with noise and activity. And one of the times in our lives when our minds and hearts tend to race the most is during seasons of desperation. When we're desperate, we get anxious and it's difficult for us to be still. We can easily spend way too much time worrying and thinking about solutions to the problems we face. And when that happens, we can miss hearing God speak to us.

Take time today to be silent and still before God. It may feel completely counterintuitive and counterproductive to do so. You may even feel it's a waste of time. And yet, in quietness you can often notice things and hear words from God you would normally not notice, hear, or feel.

So be still, and know that God alone is God (Psalm 46:10). Cease from striving and be alone with Him for part of the day. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- If silence is new for you, start with 10-15 minutes. You can even set a timer to keep you from watching the clock. Just remember that it can take a few minutes to quiet your spirit and to shut off your active mind and any noise around you.
- Start your time by telling God, "Here I am, Lord. Speak to me, and I will listen."
- Taking some deep breaths and relaxing your body will help you to slow down.
- Lastly, keep in mind that the purpose of this exercise is not simply to be silent, but to open yourself to being present before God.