

Good morning and welcome back to Silves. How are you doing?

I know you are out there!! In my mind I imagine myself going through the tennis club doors. I see Jennie or Sue on the door with a big friendly welcome, or a hug. Wayne is on the projection or is it Elsie this morning? Elaine has the coffee ready, I see Steve sorting out some last minute cables, and the worship group are already practicing. But instead I am here, in Silves, with my computer and you are out there and the one thing we all know is that life will not be the same when we finally get back to meeting together.

To be honest I can see now that the greatest tragedy for All Nations as a church and us as individuals would be if we came of this time exactly as we went into it, in terms of our spiritual life. Let me explain why I say that greatest tragedy for All Nations as a church and us as individuals would be if we came of this time exactly as we went into it, in terms of our spiritual life. At the moment, we cannot meet together, on a Sunday or the different meetings in the week, and so our individual time with God has become more important than ever to us. Maybe, this lockdown has even helped us to see that the core, the essence of our whole spiritual life flows from our personal relationship with God and not our involvement in the church. Now of course we have always known this in our heads, but these days we are actually putting it into practice. This is what I wanted to share with you this morning.

This won't be too formal but it would be helpful if you had a bible beside you. So -press the pause button, go and get your bible if you need to and with me still on Pause, read for yourself Psalm 138. Then we can get back together again.

Welcome back!

This short psalm summarises some important keys for enjoying time with God. I have to admit that at the beginning of this lockdown, I was really not enjoying this extra time with God in the way that I had expected. It was often hard going and that surprised and disappointed me. Maybe you too have struggled a bit? This psalm will help.

### **Key 1. Clearing up some wrong ideas**

1-3. I had always assumed that if I could only find the time to pray more and read the bible more then I would somehow automatically come/feel closer to god. Maybe no one else thinks like that. But at the back of my mind I somehow had this equation- more prayer and bible study=closer to God. I expected to immediately become like this picture of David here, praising God enthusiastically and then declaring as one translation puts it... At the very moment I called out to you, you answered and you strengthened me deep within my soul and breathed fresh courage into me.

Well, that was David's story. He was speaking from his experience, what he knew from his walk with God. But, there was the first problem, I was not David! It was not enough to know what God did for David, it helped, but it was no longer enough. To be honest, it probably was enough, when life was easier, when there was no corona virus, no threat to health, no danger of our business falling apart, no worries about the future, but now, facing really big problems I needed to hear Gods answer for me. Suddenly, it wasn't enough to know that God strengthened David, that God answered him when he called, now I needed to experience this for myself. It was like as if my spiritual temperature needed to be raised up a few notches...quickly. Because when it came down to it, it was between me and God.

Verse 2 gives us 2 the first and main key to David's success:

*you have exalted above all things your name and your word.*

Your name...who you are and your word...what you say...in the scripture, your written word and the way you speak to me through it.

What is clear is that there is no quick fix way to get to where David is. Les was talking about appetizers last week. The daily devotional is really great and it is amazing how relevant it is to our situation this year, even though it was written in totally different circumstances. But what I have learned is that I need more now. An appetizer is great but I need the full meal, especially now, especially in these times. And, like any healthy diet, I need to be eating well for a while before it takes effect. It is a process. It is just unrealistic to expect to get to where David is if we start from the place where many of us were starting from on day 1 of lockdown. It takes time. And we need to learn.

David calls...and the Lord answers. In between is the waiting and listening and hearing. We need to learn to wait too, to hear what God is saying to us...Now. It helps to know what God has said to David, but what is He saying to me? To you? How do I get to the place where I can also say...I, Mary called

So first key to remember: no formulas (more hours= more results) or no quick fix/instant results  
The answer is in **hearing** His word for me ...today..And it is a process.

## **Key 2. Having a right Attitude**

Verses 4 and 5 give the second key:

*May all the kings of the earth praise you, LORD,  
when they hear what you have decreed.*

<sup>5</sup>*May they sing of the ways of the LORD,  
for the glory of the LORD is great.*

David's attitude before God is one of reverence and humility. He recognises and acknowledges that God, his God, is above all

*May all the kings of the earth praise you.*

His desire is that God's glory will be recognised. He puts God in the highest place, before his own needs and problems.

We have to ask ourselves this question... What makes us spend time in prayer and bible at all?? Are we spending more time with God so that we can get the benefit of staying well?? Keeping our family protected? Solutions to our problems. All these things are right to bring to God at the right time, but first we must recognise that (v 5) the glory of the lord is great. It is our privilege to be able to come into his presence.

The importance of a humble attitude is even more obvious in v 6. Our attitude, as we come before God, makes a difference. It actually affects how God can respond to us...

*v.6. For though you are lofty and exalted,  
you stoop to embrace the lowly.  
Yet you keep your distance from those filled with pride.*

It is not always the case but sometimes when we feel God is distant, it could be a problem with pride. We might need to take time to look into this.

What is clear from this Psalm and v 6 in particular is that there are different levels of relationship with God. Some people don't know God at all. Some people know God but the relationship is distant and formal. Others have a personal relationship with God, they have had a personal experience with God and he is their Lord and saviour.... But others have an intimate relationship with God.

David, Abraham, Enoch...the people of Hebrews 11 are examples of people with an intimate relationship with God. An intimate relationship in any context is a 2 way relationship where we listen and hear as much as we speak. Intimate prayer is 2 way. God joins in the conversation. In an intimate relationship we read Gods word but it is with expectation to hear what HE is saying, to us, today, now.

So lets get rid of the formulas and the quick fix ideas. Check our attitudes when we come into Gods presence and seek out, not just a personal but an intimate relationship with God. And as we do this we will start to mature spiritually, to have a grown up relationship with God, much like David did.

And that brings us to key 3. **Growing up spiritually**

*Though I walk in the midst of trouble,  
you preserve my life.  
You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes;  
with your right hand you save me.*

David does not experience a life without problems. He may not have had corona virus and all the problems this pandemic has brought to our doors, but he did have lots of other problems as we know. As he said himself here v 7 , *he walked in the midst of trouble*. In another psalm he says *tho I walk in the shadow of death...*(even though we prefer the first verses about green pastures and still waters!).

But here in Psalm 138 and in Psalm 23 what we see is that what is important to David is that God is with him in the troubles, not that God makes them go away!! It is great to have big answers to prayers. But that is not always our experience. Sometimes, like David here, it is a long walk in the midst of trouble.

There are 2 important points here-

1. We need to know what Gods word says and not make it what we want to hear...it is not all green pastures, sometimes we will be in the midst of trouble and
2. The importance of hearing Gods personal word for us in our individual situation. Then we can walk in faith in the midst of trouble. So it is back to calling and then waiting and listening to hear Gods personal word for us, today.

And finally Key 4. **A promise and a certainty.** v8.

*The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;  
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.  
Do not forsake the work of your hands.*

That is the best news. Relax. He is in charge, not you. He will bring to completion the work He has started. He will not abandon us. He loves us with a constant and endless love. This is bigger than you

imagine. God created you and me for a purpose. We are in the hands of a very reliable potter who loves us and will bring to completion the work he has already started.

So be encouraged. If you are struggling, have a look back at some of these keys. Maybe you are just expecting too much too fast. Maybe you have forgotten that it is a 2 way relationship and listening and hearing are as important as speaking. Maybe you need to check your attitude, are you humble and aware of whom God is. Maybe you have been experiencing some growing pains as your relationship deepens and matures through these difficult days. But I want to leave you with the promise and the assurance of the last verse.

*The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;  
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.  
Do not forsake the work of your hands.*