

My Soul Feels Dry

Selected verses from Psalm 42, Matthew 22:37-38, John 4:24, Isaiah 55:9

Good morning, men! In the hall they put out this weekly newspaper so on the way out, I picked up a copy and was interested to see one of the headlines was, “Red-light cameras multiply. Winter Park, Maitland put up seven cameras, plan six more.” Too late. I got home and that very day in the mail was a ticket for \$158. I was thinking, *Whoops!* But you know, it says the city’s third camera went in on Aloma and Lakemont and has issued 332 tickets. Make that 333. What I want to know is what happened to the fun of it? It used to be cat and mouse, back and forth, and I don’t know how many of you are cops—we have some cops here—[but] I wish you guys would do your jobs, relying on all this technology.

Today we are going to be talking about the deeply felt need for transcendence, awe and communion – the need of our soul to feel those things. The symptom of this is my soul feels dry. In this series, *Man Alive*, we are looking at seven primal needs represented by seven symptoms:

- I just feel like I am in the middle of this thing alone.
- Secondly, I don’t feel like God cares about me personally.
- I don’t feel like my life has purpose. It feels like things are random.
- I have these destructive behaviors that keep dragging me down.
- My soul feels dry.
- Many of the most important relationships – they are not helping; they aren’t working.
- I just don’t feel like I am doing anything that is making a difference and that is leaving the world a better place.

THE PRIMAL NEED

Today is *My Soul Feels Dry*. That’s the title of the talk. First, I want to talk about the primal need that is involved here. Many years ago I went to a luncheon where Walt Meloon, the founder of Correct Craft, the boat manufacturing company that makes the world famous Ski Nautique, was speaking. To be honest, I don’t remember anything he said. But I do remember that at the end of his message, he was standing by the door and he took my hand in both of his and shook them vigorously like this. He said with passion, “Isn’t God good?” I was sort of shocked by that. I was thinking, *Yeah, I think God is good, but obviously not nearly as good as Walt thinks he is.* I was just struck by the idea that he could be faking it, but he would have had to been a world class liar to pull that off. And then I was thinking that he’d been able to really find something to satisfy him deeply in the soul that I had not found, and frankly, it looked very attractive. I realized that most men don’t have what Walt had and I knew that I wanted it because at the time I certainly did not.

That’s what we are going to look at today. The real problem here is that most men only know enough about God to be disappointed with him. We see this in some statistics I’m going to read. This is an advanced reading copy of *Man Alive*. It is not available but I’m going to read a couple of statistics because it has been a downward trend that has been going on for at least 20 years. The Barna Group’s

report on the state of the church shows that American men's satisfaction with churches is waning in really every area – attendance is down to 36%; serving is down to 18%; sharing their faith is down to 23%; believing the Bible is down to 33%; participation in adult education classes is down to a mere 13%.

As men withdraw from places of worship, it's no wonder that their souls feel dry. And men that I talk to – of course they hate this. There is this big fat lie that's been going around ever since I can remember. It goes something like this: You are a guy and guys are just not as spiritually wired as their wives and girlfriends are and so the women are naturally going to be more spiritual. But that has not been my experience, and for a lot of you, you know that that's not true or you at least don't want it to be true and you suspect that there is something else going on. As men, we do have a deep, primal need given to us by God for transcendence, to experience transcendence or awe, and for communion with God. You should be open to Psalm 42. Let's read a few of these verses from David because this will resonate with you. Most of you have probably read or heard these verses before. The reason they resonate is because they really do express something deep inside of our souls.

Verse 1: As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, oh God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with him? Verse 5: Why are you downcast, oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Verse 7: Deep calls to deep in the war of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. Verse 9: I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by my enemy?" My bones suffer mortal agony. Verse 11: Why are you downcast, oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me?

Do you remember the first time you felt this longing for God? For me, it was as an acolyte. I remember looking through the *Book of Common Prayer* and trying to conjure up a sense of God. There was some kind of a hunger, some kind of a pain inside of me, and I wanted to....I knew intuitively that God was the place to go to get this need satisfied. Nothing happened as a young boy. I went to a church where nobody ever picked me up, took me under his wing, showed me what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. So nothing happened, nothing got satisfied at that time. Where were you when you first had that hunger, that longing, that desire?

Robert and his girlfriend were lying on a blanket next to a pond staring up into a star-studded sky. He would later recall he suddenly became aware of a presence—of transcendence—something reaching into his soul from the cosmos and awakening inside of him a yearning to know God – a longing to have an understanding of this transcendence. He was filled with a sense of awe. In a few moments, that feeling passed and he returned to his secular way of thinking and acting. But a fuse was lit that day and he was never the same again. That began a search for who or what.

Now turn with me to Matthew, Chapter 22:37. The Bible tells us something you all have read, you all have heard, you all know. It's always good to see with your own eyes. The Bible tells us what the first and the most important thing you can do is ; the single most important thing in life that you can do—what it is—you see it right here. Jesus is replying to a lawyer, an expert in the law, and he says, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul and with all of your mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment." This is the most important thing that you need to know and do.

Yet, it's hard. Yeah, it's hard to love God in this way. That's why the Psalmist ended up with his soul feeling downcast within him – because there is a veil between here and there. What happens is unfortunately you know the story because you have lived this story; we've all lived this story. We as men gravitate toward getting things done in the physical world. I get that. I'm that way. So we get wrapped up in that. We tend to get over-scheduled. We tend to get overly tired at the end of the day and at the end of the week and really just want to withdraw. When we do this, we are feeling the pressure to meet deadlines, keep wives happy and take care of kids. We get caught up in the rat race, start leading an unexamined life. One day we wake up and we feel like our souls are sort of shriveled up. Something is withered inside of us. We feel abandonment.

Actually, what happened is that we are the ones that have done the abandoning. We've abandoned this great spiritual inheritance that we have in Jesus and we end up living like orphans.

It doesn't have to be that way, though. How does it not have to be that way? That's what the big idea is today: **99% of communion and loving God is just showing up.** I hope this message encourages you deeply that you can satisfy your soul's longing for transcendence, communion and awe, because 99% of this is just showing up.

THE BUSINESS OF SOUL-MAKING

That's because the main business of God is soul-making. God loves souls. God loves to create souls, to save souls, to nurture souls, to revive souls; that's the main business of God. That's why 99% of it is just you showing up, because this is what He is going to do anyway. This is what God is wanting to do anyway.

On your questions, there are a number of examples of things that can trigger this sense of closeness with God and you'll have a chance to look through the list with more time later. You could experience this feeling—desire—by looking across the Grand Canyon. You could be standing in a mountain stream with a pair of waders, a rod and a reel, and the feeling could come upon you. You might be sitting in a holy place; it could be as lavish as Westminster Abby or as humble as a concrete church. It could be with the birth of a child, the death of a parent, or some life-altering event that takes place. It could be sensing the burden of the sins that you have committed, being overwhelmed by them. That was my first experience of actually sensing the presence of God and it was terrifying. It was not a good one. My first actual encounter with God was terror.

So I was sitting in an adult education class with my wife and several other young couples. I was leaning back in my chair with my arms crossed and staring at the terrazzo floor, thinking about the upcoming week and all that I had to get done, all I wanted to get done, all my ambitions. I wondered which one of these people in the class I could get to be investors in some of the real estate deals. That is what I was there for. The teacher, Dan, read a passage out of Ephesians and when he read Verse 25—husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church—I felt like somebody had just taken a Taser to me and put 50,000 volts of electricity through me and I couldn't believe what had happened.

I knew somebody had ratted me out to the teacher. I knew that teacher had picked that verse because of me. At that point, within a matter of a few seconds, my undergarments were completely soaked. I was beet red and I was sweating profusely. It happened [snaps] that quick. I had been looking, as I said, at the terrazzo floor. I could not lift my eyes off the floor. I was so humiliated. I was so embarrassed; I was so ashamed; I was so truly guilty. I had been found out and I just knew that... When he read that, I just knew that every other person sitting in that circle of metal chairs was staring at me in utter disgust and contempt and disdain, because of the dirty, rotten scoundrel that I was. It was several minutes before I could even look up. When I finally did, I realized that the class had moved on. Whatever had been taking place was just between me and God.

You've had experiences – maybe one like this; maybe one like Robert lying on a blanket, staring up at the star-studded sky; or like one of the ones I just mentioned. This is the business of God. This is the business of soul-making. The reason you don't have to do too much is that God wants this so much more than you will ever want this – just as with your very own flesh and blood – sons, if you should have one. In the same way that a son could never ever possibly understand the vastness of his father's love and desire for the best for that child, so we are with our Father in heaven. There's no reason—absolutely no reason whatsoever—why you cannot have encounters with God on a regular, consistent basis. They cannot be manufactured; they are given, but they can be sought.

The way we do that is the big idea for the day: 99% of communion and loving God is showing up.

A GUY'S GUIDE TO HANGING OUT WITH JESUS

Let me explain. What I want to do in the time we have remaining is I want to give you a guys' guide to hanging out with Jesus. You can't manufacture these experiences, but you can put yourself in the way of them happening to you by showing up. So I want to give you what I think are three priorities. There will be others, too, of course, but these are the three priorities that are favored to me at least.

The first one is know about God and know God. Know about God and know God. Michael is extremely intellectual and has a tremendous knowledge of the Bible and God, but it was all this head knowledge and he knew that something was missing. He longed to have a more personal kind of experience with God. This is a well-known distinction in theology. You have probably heard it before, the difference between knowing about God and knowing God. Knowing about God—let's call that for the head—and knowing God—let's call that for the heart: theology for the head and doxology for the heart. This is the truth of God's Word.

Turn with me to John 4:24. Jesus explains in this text that God is spirit and his worshippers must worship him in spirit and in truth. So to worship him in spirit is the doxology of knowing God personally and then worshipping him in truth is the theology of worshipping God with your head. So it's both head and heart.

It's just extremely valuable to keep this in your mind at all times. We don't just come here to know about God. This is a Bible study. You didn't come here just to know about God. You came here to have a transforming experience with God. I pray every Friday, *Lord, when men walk through these doors, I pray that your Holy spirit would palpably be present to them, that they'd experience the power and presence*

of Jesus when they are here, and that they would have a transforming encounter with you. And so God's ready, I'm ready, and are you ready?

When you come to learn for the head—to learn about God—be sure to also come with your heart, and be prepared to have God *do* something—to meet with you—so you can commune with God and experience that sense of awe and transcendence.

So that's the first priority. The second one is leave room for mystery. Turn to Isaiah, Chapter 55, Verse 9. I mentioned this before here, that one year—a couple of years ago—when I was reading Genesis 1, the creation account, I exclaimed out loud, "Mystery abounds!" Actually I squealed like a girl, but I'm not going to do that here. Mystery abounds! So I wrote that down and then I had this idea that I would write the initials M.A. for mystery abounds at the bottom of each page of the Bible that year where I either saw something that was mysterious, that I didn't understand, or that raised a question. I put a checkmark by it and put the initials M.A. at the bottom of the page. Does anyone remember how many pages of the Bible that I put that at the bottom of the page? All of them. And multiple checkmarks on most pages. There is so much mystery in the Word of God.

We see here in Isaiah 55:9: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts," says God.

I'm going to ask you to do something right now. I'm going to ask you to bow your heads and close your eyes in prayer. Spend five seconds considering what this posture is communicating to God. Just think about it... Okay, raise your heads. You thought about the posture you assumed before your Creator. What was the thought that went through your mind? It was probably something like, *He is the infinite God and I'm just me*. Or it could have been just the word humility, the posture of humility. Leave room for mystery. Leave room for the mystery of this infinite, omnipotent, omnipresent, omnibenevolent, self-existing God. To take that one step further – never want a God that you can fully understand. If you have a god that you can fully understand, you got the wrong god.

Third priority... The first one is to know about God and know God, the second priority is to leave room for mystery, and the third priority is to take your time. Take your time.

When I'm in New York City I like to go through the Metropolitan Museum of Art and see the Monets. I was there with a colleague once a couple of years ago and we caught a cab for the airport; we had about 10 extra minutes. It was a tight trip – in and out. I told him that I'd like to go see the Monets, and I asked him if he'd like to go with me and catch them. We had the cab driver pull up to the Met and asked him to wait, and then we brisk-walked in, we brisk-walked through the Monet collection, and then we brisk-walked back to the cab.

Let me just tell you that 10 minutes with Monet is not enough. You just can't get Monet when you treat him like fast food. You have to linger. You have to wait. You have to just stare. You have to just look and you just have to wait for it to come to you. And so it is in our relationship with God.

Feeding our soul is not just another item we check off on our to-do list. It's something that takes time. If loving God with all of our heart is the most important thing and—think about this—if only one thing is needed, according to Jesus speaking to Martha, and if what does it profit for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul, if all these things are true, then isn't it worth not only knowing about God but knowing God, and leaving room for mystery, and taking out time with him? You've got a worksheet on the center of the table. If you want to go further with this—your being versus doing profile—I would encourage you to take a few minutes over the weekend and just answer those questions and see if you can't quiet yourself before God. So remember the main business of God is soul-making and he wants it more than you want it. That's why the big idea today is true – that **99% of communion and loving God is just showing up**. Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our dearest Father, Lord, we come to You humbly. We do assume this posture of humility before You. Lord, I pray that You would let each of us have a transforming encounter with You today and every day – that we would experience Your transcendence and awe, and that You would meet this deep primal need that we have. I pray you would fill our souls with You, and that we would do our part, too, and show up. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.