

Mystery

How Life Feels - part 5

Book of Psalms

Seth Gatchell May 17, 2020

Topic for the week: Dealing with the mystery of life and when God seems to be a mystery.

When I was a kid I loved mysteries. Our family watched Perry Mason, and over the years I have read the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes numerous times. In spite of watching and reading countless mysteries I rarely unravel the mystery. What normally happens is I latch on to evidence and clues that lead me to wrong assumptions and wrong conclusions!

Life sometimes seems like a mystery, and so does God! It's very easy to draw wrong assumptions and draw wrong conclusions about Him, life, and ourselves.

DAYS 1-3: Explore 3 Mysteries of God's Seeming Indifference

- Is God AROUND? Is He listening?
- Has God ABANDONED us? Why won't He act?
- Is God ATTACKING us? Is He our foe???

DAYS 4-5: What is God Doing During Times of Seeming Indifference?

DAY 1: Is God AROUND? The silence of God.

*Psalm 39:12 Hear my prayer, O Lord, **listen to my cry for help; be not deaf** to my weeping. For I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were. (13) Look away from me, that I may rejoice again before I depart and am no more.*

1. For what is it David, the psalmist asking?
2. What is inferred in David's asking?
3. The seeming silence of God engages our hearts with God in an internal struggle. We are forced to wrestle with God honestly.
4. This struggle is illustrated in these verses! On one hand David wants God (verse 12). On the other hand what is the opposite desire? (Verse 13).
5. Have you experienced the seeming silence of God? How?
6. What do you think God was doing in you during those times?

DAY 2. Has God ABANDONED us?

1. A common experience of Christians is spiritual **dryness**.

Revelation 3:15-16 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one of the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth!

2. How does God ignite a renewed passion for Him? One paradoxical answer is in our feeling abandoned by God! Instead of drawing us closer to Him, He seems to exacerbate the problem!

3. To be abandoned feels cruel, a kind of betrayal we never saw coming!

*Psalm 44:11-12, 17-19 **You gave us up to be devoured like sheep** and have scattered us among the nations.*

...You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing for their sale....

*All this happened to us, **though we have not forgotten you or been false to your covenant**. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness.*

4. What is most perplexing to the psalmist is this: He cannot figure out any legitimate reason why blessings should be removed! Do you think the psalmist was accurate in his assessment that the people had done nothing to bring on God's abandonment?

5. What is stunning in Psalms is that God invites us to Himself even in our fury! It's during these times that God digs deeper into unrecognized recesses of the heart to expose what's wrong in us and to expose the deeper desires of the redeemed heart! (More on this in DAY 4 & 5).

6. When you feel spiritually dry, what conclusion(s) do you usually draw:

a. About yourself?

b. About God?

7. Feeling abandoned by God is not "a problem to solve." It is an opportunity for us to engage with God in deeper ways!

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3. Is God ATTACKING us?

1. This the third way God and His ways seem mysterious to us.

Hosea 13:5-8 I cared for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me. So I will come upon them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk by the path. Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will tear them apart.

2. We all like Psalm 23. “The Lord is my *shepherd*.”

3. But what images of God does He use about Himself in Psalm 13?

4. What did the people do that precipitated such extreme actions on God’s part?

5. What was the effect of His blessings to them?

6. When did God become a lion?

7. God acts, not because His “feelings were hurt.” They had entered onto a path of destruction!
Satisfied→Proud→Forgot. This always ends very badly!

8. The people could not see they were on a path to destruction. God portrays Himself as a lion in the same way that a surgeon goes to any lengths to save the life of his/her patient.

9. God will not let His children wander endlessly away without severe actions!

10. Have you ever felt attacked by God, either directly or indirectly through painful people or circumstances? Describe your experience.

DAY 4: What is God doing during these times of mystery?

1. When God seems indifferent, it seems to us that God is doing nothing! Instead, God is very active, doing something that is very difficult for us to see!
2. He is digging deeper into our hearts!
3. Imagine your heart is like a **one-story house**. You “know” your house, every room, every color of each room, the flooring, the windows, the curtains, the furniture, etc. In this analogy the point is this: **You know you!** And you know you in two big ways:
 - a. CHARACTER: You know “the better angels” of your character. You’re aware of your good intentions, your kind words, your service to others, your uprightness and honesty.
 - b. DESIRES. You know what seems to you to be your strongest desires. You know your legitimate desires and your illegitimate desires.
4. **What you can’t see** is that your “house” (your heart) has a **basement**. In the cellar of our hearts, down beneath the first floor is the bottom half of our hearts. What times of the mystery of life or the mystery of God exposes what’s down in the cellar. Up until this experience we weren’t even aware we had a “cellar”! (The bottom half of our hearts).
5. Down in the basement God **exposes** what is in there!
 - a. CHARACTER: You begin to see the dark side of your character. You begin to see things like your petty heart, jealousy, envy, a snarky attitude, a critical heart, lust, pride and a host of other things you’d rather not see, let alone admit about yourself. The basement is a ruined, decrepit, smelly, musty place. No one would want to live there. You “naturally” avoid looking there!
 - b. DESIRES: For the Christian with a redeemed heart, God exposes, not just the junk and gunk we just wrote about. There is also a magnificent *wine cellar* down there! The “wine cellar” is the divine desires God has planted in the Christian’s heart that are deeper than the desires we thought were most important up on the “first floor.”

Isaiah 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

³ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

6. In short, what God is doing is exposing the “basement” of our heart to us for two purposes:
 - a. To bring us to a greater hatred of sin, and
 - b. To expose our deepest hunger and thirst—for Him!
7. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: The necessity of the redemptive struggle of the heart

1. Paul lays out the redemptive struggle going on in our heart between our sinful nature (in the basement) and the redeemed heart (also in the basement).

Romans 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

2. Psalms gives scores of examples of the redemptive struggle of the soul. Here are two more examples of God digging through the first floor of the heart to expose what is in the basement.

Psalm 80:4-6 O Lord God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. You have made us a source of contention to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us.

Psalm 80:12 Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes?

Psalm 50:7-8 Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me....

Psalm 50:14-15 Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.

3. The redemptive struggle of the heart exposes two realities in the redeemed heart:

a. **Corrupt character** that will continue to make colossal messes until every piece is exposed and dealt with. (Think of having cancer which you can't see, but if not exposed and treated will kill you).

b. **Divine desires** that are deeper than what you once thought were your most important desires (up on the first floor). It is these deeper desires that lead us to God and to the riches of His character and relationship. It is the road to real joy, and provides us with the motivation to battle whatever is in us that keeps us from experiencing the life of Christ within us and reflecting the life of Christ to those around us.

4. What strikes you from either today's devotional or the week's theme?