

Psalm 23 Series (Session 4)

by Joseph Carroll

The sermon emphasizes the importance of cultivating intimacy with Christ, prioritizing quiet time and meditation, and submitting to God's presence to become spiritual and live a life of fellowship with God.

Duration: 32:07

Scripture: Psalm 23:1-3, Psalm 90:1, Matthew 6:33, John 10:27, John 15:4, Acts 17:28, Romans 7:4, 1 Corinthians 1:9, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Christian Life", "Spiritual Intimacy", "Fellowship with Christ"

Description

Joseph Carroll emphasizes the importance of cultivating a personal relationship with Christ as our true dwelling place, rather than merely seeking His blessings. He warns against the distractions of culture that lead us away from intimacy with God, urging believers to prioritize fellowship with Jesus above all else. Carroll highlights that true achievement in the Christian life is not about statistics or gifts, but about devotion and love for the Lord. He encourages the congregation to be conscious of Christ's presence, casting their cares upon Him and engaging in quiet time for spiritual growth. Ultimately, he calls for a return to the simplicity of life centered on fellowship with Christ, which brings clarity and peace amidst life's complexities.

Transcript

In Psalm 90, verse 1, the psalmist has this to say, Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Is he your dwelling place? Do you dwell with him? Do you live with him? Walk with him? Know him? There is no psalm comparable with the 23rd Psalm to bring us into a realization of the will of God, which is that he should be our dwelling place.

And most of the truths in this psalm, unless you cultivate the conscious presence of Christ, are only going to be a repetition of things which the shepherd provides. And you're going to miss the psalm altogether. It's only going to become a psalm of provision of things, rather than fellowship with a person.

That's why Hudson Taylor's experience of giving us a little commentary on the Song of Solomon is so very important. When did you last hear a series of messages on the Song of Solomon? If I am to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, strength, would I not find out just something about how to do it? But no, we become the victim of our day, the victim of the grinding hot words of activity, activity, activity. Achievement.

Well, what achievement? What achievement? Statistics? Are you certain that's achievement? The achiever is the one who loves his Lord. God does not look for men with great gifts, but men with a great capacity for devotion. That's what he's after.

So we need to divorce ourselves from the currents of our culture, which never lead us to Christ. They lead away from Christ, because that culture is cultivated by the devil himself and made to fit exactly the people he designs it for. And that's one of the advantages in living in different countries.

We lived in the Orient for ten years, Europe on and off for a year, Britain for a year. Other countries, Formosa six months, Hong Kong constantly. So you study the cultures and you see the power of the enemy in taking a culture to deceive an individual and to bind him with false concepts.

Culture is not Christ. Culture exalts the man, makes something of the man, and the man Christ Jesus was meek and lowly of heart and despised and rejected of men. And if you're going to cultivate his presence, you're going to have to walk in lowliness with a due appropriate sense of your nothingness apart from him.

Of course we know that's ABC, but we need to come back to ABC. In him we live and move and have our being. That means I cannot think a thought, I cannot exercise one activity apart from him.

He is the one in whom I live and move and have my being. The very fact that I can stand here this morning and utter a word is because of him. By him all things consist.

What a wonderful person he is. Is he your dwelling place? So you must guard against seeking blessings rather than the blessing. The blessings come with him.

Don't seek and you will find blessings. In other words, if you give, you receive, if you keep, you lose. We've said that a number of times, but I'm sure it still hasn't penetrated.

Because the desire of the fallen man, the desire of this fallen nature of ours, is self-satisfaction, self-exaltation, self is at the center of it all. And the Lord Jesus Christ comes to deal with that and deal with it by his cross in order that we might enter into an intimate fellowship with him. Then in our days, of course, you can be occupied with a burden.

People have burdens. Rather than the burden bearer. Why is it that people do not cast all their care upon him? Because they're not conscious of his presence.

That is the command of scripture. Casting all your care, hurling all your distractions upon him. But why do people not do that? Simply because they are not conscious of his presence and of his nearness.

Now I want you to take this little word down and I want you to memorize it. And if you come back next year, if the Lord tarries, your authority for coming will be your ability to memorize this word. In other words, you will be met by Miss Richardson and if you cannot quote it, as they say in Japan, sumimasen.

I'm very sorry. Life reduced to fellowship with Christ makes the complicated simple. That's a very important statement.

Life reduced to fellowship with Christ makes the complicated simple. But it's not simple to reduce it to fellowship with Christ. Because the devil is always coming on to add something more.

Have you noticed that? He's always trying to add something so that you'll have all that top heavy baggage that you have to carry with you everywhere you go. Life reduced to fellowship with Christ. That's what life is all about.

I once had the privilege of listening to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in Westminster Chapel in London. Whenever I was in London, I used to make my way on Sunday mornings to Westminster Chapel to hear Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Easily the greatest preacher in the English-speaking world by far.

By far. And he preached on 1 Corinthians 1.9. And I've never had quite an experience listening to a preacher as I had that morning. That man actually lifted that congregation into the presence of God.

And you could sense it. And I thought, how much higher is he going? We just kept going higher and higher and higher. 1 Corinthians 1.9. What is it? God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

That's your calling. That is what God has called you to. The Corinthians had departed from this.

They had become partyists. I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos. Of course we have the same thing today.

I'm a Baptist, I'm a Presbyterian, I'm a Methodist. It's exactly the same thing. And he hit hard at that.

They're all taken up with gifts. People are all taken up with gifts today. And the more you're taken up with this and the more you're taken up with that, the more you're going to depart from what you're called to.

You're called to fellowship with Jesus Christ. And that speaks of intimacy. That is your calling.

That's your primary calling. The primary calling of the Christian is fellowship with Jesus Christ. Is it that which you desire to achieve more than anything else on this earth? It ought to be.

That's your calling. He is our dwelling place. Christianity is what? It's all about a person.

It's fellowship with a person. I was speaking to some young people last night and we happened to touch on marriage. Young people sometimes, of course, do touch on marriage.

And I recall one time in the army, in the early years of the war, one of the fellows said to me, well, are you going to marry? I said, I am married. Married at your age? Yes. Married to another? Even to him that is raised from the dead? That's what Romans 7 tells me.

I said, I am married. Thank God I knew it even then. You are married.

You are married to Christ. That we might be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead. Isn't it time to start cultivating intimacy with the one to whom you have been joined? That's what Christianity is all about.

It's all about loving a person. And that love must be cultivated. We've touched again and again on Hudson Taylor in these days.

He was brought before me again this morning. You will find on the book table at least three or four volumes on Hudson Taylor, he being dead yet speaker. In his later years, when he was quite an old man, he would often travel across the rough cobblestones of China in a springless cart for hours on end, come to a Chinese inn, a crowded Chinese inn, late at night.

And those traveling with him would try and find a little corner in the inn, very difficult. But they'd try and find a little corner for him. And there, without fail, before dawn, every morning, there would be the lighting of a candle and the opening of his Bible.

And Hudson Taylor was worshipping Jesus Christ. He was worshipping Jesus Christ always before dawn. What was he doing? He was lying down and he was being led for that day.

It seems to be an achievement these days if you can sleep in. Without fail, whenever our school year is finished and we begin the summer period, somebody's going to come to see me and say, Now, do we still abide by the same program? Are we still required to arise at this time? Why not? Can't we sleep in? Well, the devil doesn't sleep in. You don't have to rise at that time.

You can rise an hour earlier, if you wish. C.T. Studd. Charles Studd.

One of the great missionaries of all time. Captain of the English Cricket Eleven. That means he was the most famous sportsman of England.

Captain of the English Eleven. Graduated from Cambridge University. Went out to China.

Spent many, many years in China. Returned to England and everybody thought, Well, he's going to retire now. He's an old man.

And he can enjoy a leisurely life. But the Lord told him to go to Africa. To the Congo.

The heart of Africa. So he said goodbye to his wife and plunged into the heart of Africa. And a number of young missionaries went with him.

And he founded the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade. And their first field was the Congo. Well, he had them all up.

I think it was at five o'clock in the morning to start the day. And one of their number came to him. And he said, Mr. Studd.

He said, we're just not getting enough time to be alone with the Lord. He said, all right, we'll rise an hour earlier. And they did.

We just have to get up earlier. You see the spirit of the man. He's an old man.

Is he retiring back there amidst the green fields of England? No, he's plowing a furrow for his garden in the jungle. We don't know much of that spirit. We just want to sleep in.

My friend, the Lord waits every morning to have fellowship with you. He's waiting. Waiting to have fellowship with you.

Waiting to speak to you. So when I was a young Christian, I would always ask myself four questions each day. Usually about midday, later in the afternoon, perhaps in early evening.

And they were these. Did you have your quiet time this morning? That was first. Just go back now.

Did I have my quiet time? Number one. Number two. Number two.

What did your Lord say to you? What did he say to you? What did he say to you? If he said something to you, it's worth remembering. Maybe you need to write it down. What did he say to you? What do you mean to say? What did he say to you? Does he speak with an audible voice? I've had quite a number of people in Greenville ask me that.

God speaks to you? Well, of course he does. Doesn't he speak to you? He says, my sheep hear my voice. That's simple enough, isn't it? Do you know why you don't hear his voice? Because you're not lying down as his sheep.

That's simple enough. My sheep hear my voice. So, that question can be a dead giveaway.

If you're not hearing his voice, are you one of his sheep? And if you're not one of his sheep, you're in trouble. My sheep hear my voice. Right? Did you have your quiet time? What did he say to you? What did he say to you? I remember about eight years ago, I went to South America for the South American mission to have a series of meetings for their conference for their missionaries in Peru.

And I landed at Lima, flew across the Andes to a place called Pucallpa, and then in a little single-engine Cessna way into the jungle to their Bible school. They were very wise. They didn't bring the natives out into Lima to a Bible school in Lima.

They kept them in the jungle. They had great wisdom. And I landed on the little dusty strip there, and first evening at supper, I said to a rather jolly missionary, I said, Have a conference last year? He asked, Who's your speaker? And he told me, and I knew this man quite well.

So, I said, Have a good time? I said, What was his subject? He said, Oh, we had a terrific time. I said, What did he say? Oh, it was tremendous. I said, Yes, but what did he speak on? What did he say? He said, We had a terrific time, brother.

He couldn't tell me a thing the man said. Had a great time. I said, Yes, but what did he say? Oh, terrific.

It was terrific. You know, some people are like that with the Lord. Have you quite done this morning? Does the Lord speak? Yes.

What did he say? Oh, let me think. You should remember what he says. That's a living word from your living Lord.

That is imperative that you remember it. That's a word from God. Do you realize that? That God is speaking to you.

It should be with you right throughout the day. And it must become part of you. You must submit yourself to it.

You must obey it. What did he say to me? What did I say to him? I prayed. Well, what did I pray for? And then the final one is important.

What am I believing him for today? What am I believing him for? He spoke to me. What did he say to me? Did he speak to me about some need I had? Well, he spoke to me about it, that I might appropriate him as the answer to my need. Did I do it? And did I believe that he had delivered me? Did I believe it? What am I believing him for? I prayed for a certain person.

What did I pray for that person? Was I believing throughout the day, following my act of faith? Did I adopt the attitude of faith and really believe him for the fulfilling of that for which I asked in that person's life? It's going to be according to your faith that he's going to work. Did I really believe that? Four questions. You might ask yourself those questions.

First of all, did you have your quiet time? The devil's going to try to keep you from it. He's going to try and by any means make it anything but a quiet time. And a time for the Lord.

And in that time, he's going to speak to you in the stillness, in the quietness, and you are going to speak to him. And then you're going to believe him for that which you've asked of him in that quiet time. Now, we must go on in the psalm.

Of course, we're not going to finish it this morning. That's reasonably obvious. Because we've dealt, I believe, with the most important point that the Holy Spirit wanted to bring before us this week.

It's the stillness. It's the lying down. There can be no restoration of soul without that.

There can be no ability to face the difficult situation victoriously without that. We've got to get hold of that this week. It is imperative.

And if you study the lives of the great ones, you always find the same thing. For instance, Wesley was called the epitome of serenity. Nothing disturbed him.

Absolutely nothing. Westcott, the great Bishop Westcott, who followed Bishop Lightfoot as the theological authority in the Anglican Church. For some years, the head of the religion department at Cambridge University became, after his retirement from that position, the bishop who was the theological authority in the Anglican Church.

You had Bishop Lightfoot, then you had Bishop Westcott, and Bishop Westcott was followed by Bishop Henley Mole, my favorite author. And Bishop Westcott was a very humble man. When he drove into the town of his bishopric, the main town, he always drove with his back to the people.

He said he was not worthy to face them. You might say, that's extreme. Well, that's what he did.

He was a great scholar. We still use some of his classics today. We have them in our library.

This is what his son said of his father before he died. He said, in his later years, my father obviously lived in two worlds at once. Whilst his feet were set in the world, his spirit was in the presence of God.

Everything that came to him was met in that presence. Nothing could ever surprise him from that attitude. What a testimony.

Here he is, one of the great evangelical scholars in the world of his day, certainly the greatest in England. And he's living in two worlds at once. His feet are set in the world, his spirit is in the presence of God.

Everything that came to him was met in that presence. Nothing could ever surprise him from that attitude. Should we not desire that? Should we not desire it? This is an age of a dearth of spiritual men.

It's one of our basic problems. I had a sister in Japan. She had labored in China, and when the Communists took over, she came across to Japan.

And she commenced with her husband a Bible study for Chinese in the city of Tokyo. And once every week, every Thursday evening, I would have a Bible study with these Chinese Christians. And I mentioned the name of a very famous theologian, a world-famous theologian, and he would be in those days considered, he's dead long since, but in those days he'd be sort of perhaps one of the two top theologians in this nation.

And I mentioned a work of his, which I'd been reading, and she said, he was a very gifted man, but of course, Mr. Carroll, he was not spiritual. How sad. He was a very gifted man.

He was a genius. He was a genius. But he was not spiritual.

Well, he's a zero. In God's sight, he's a zero. In man's sight, he's a great scholar.

In God's sight, he's a zero. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, not intellectually discerned. Paul leaves us in no doubt in his first epistle to Corinthians, the second chapter, concerning that.

If you are to discern spiritual truths, you must be a spiritual man. The natural man understands that not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.

Spiritually discerned. That's why you have Bunyan the Tinker with his Pilgrim's Progress, second only to the Bible. Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned.

And how do you become spiritual? By submitting to the One who alone can make you spiritual, and walking with Him. Have you ever noticed that you become very much like those you associate with if they are powerful personalities? We had a very godly man in Australia. He was Principal of the Baptist Theological College of New South Wales.

He was Principal when he was 29 years old. Principal Morling. He was also Professor of Church History at Sydney University.

He was a very godly man. Christ-like man. And he had a slight lisp in his speech.

He lisped. And you know, almost every graduate of that seminary had a slight lisp. Principal Morling.

What a godly man. When I was converted, my former world simply crashed round me. Nobody does that in Australia.

Australians are not church goers. You might get 3 or 4 percent in church on Sundays. There's one thing an Australian hates, it's a hypocrite.

You'd better, if you take a stand for the Lord, you'd better be the real thing, or you're in trouble. And so my former world, of course, crashed. I remember one day walking into a golf club with a little button in my lapel, Jesus saves.

I was very enthusiastic in those days. Trust I am now. I had this Jesus saves badge on.

You would have thought I was a plague. They scattered in all directions. My world simply collapsed.

And I was having a hard time and the devil was hammering me and he was saying, is it worth it? Is it worth it? Is it worth it? Are you sure about this? Do you really know that Jesus Christ is God? And he hammered

me for weeks with that. And then I went to a conference in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. Beautiful spot.

And I can still remember quite vividly hearing a piano played and it was almost heavenly as I walked through the mist to the great big tent where the meetings were being held. Never experienced anything like it. And I walked into that tent and I sat down and I looked at the chairman and I said, it's real.

I know it's real. I was looking into the face of the first Christ-like man I'd ever seen and it was mauling. That settled it.

I had seen the living Christ in a man and that convinced me. Nothing else would have. It was costing me too much.

No more questions. Jesus Christ lives because I've seen him in that man. And he was in that man because he walked in fellowship with God.

He was a great scholar. That's not the important thing. He was a great Christian because he walked with his Lord.

Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Is he your dwelling place? Where do you dwell? Where do you live? With whom do you live? With the shepherd. Shall we pray? Father, we pray that you will be merciful to us and gracious to us and forgiving.

You are always forgiving, always compassionate for which we praise thee. Forgive our foolish ways and, Father, enable us by the ministry of thy spirit, the strengthening ministry of thy spirit to commit ourselves to cultivating a life of fellowship with Jesus Christ. That this shall be the first thing in our lives.

Nothing shall interfere with it. And we shall know what it is to be led by waters of stillness and experience restoration of soul. Oh, Father, grant it, we pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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