

A Sermon
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Grace Baptist Church
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A Church for Seekers

Psalm 63

Over the past twenty to thirty years, many congregations, especially within the evangelical tradition, have adopted a more "seeker-sensitive" approach to doing church. Not all people would use that exact phrase. Some would say "seeker-friendly." Some would say "seeker-oriented." Some would say "seeker-driven." The terminology may vary, but the basic approach remains the same, namely, to make significant changes in the way the church does things, especially in its worship services, in order to make the Christian faith more accessible and appealing to non-Christians. The idea is to try to connect with unbelievers who might otherwise never darken the door of a church. These folks who have little, if any, previous exposure to Christianity or to the life of the church, might just give the gospel a chance if they can experience it in a less traditional setting.

As a result, lots of things in seeker-oriented churches look and feel different. Dress codes are more casual. Music is more contemporary. Multimedia presentations are more prominent. Skits and drama performances are more common. Sermons are more intensely focused on the practicalities of the Christian faith. Even the buildings and the space within them don't look as traditional or explicitly religious. All these factors, and others, come together to hopefully create an atmosphere in which newcomers to Christianity will be more open and receptive to the claims of the gospel. The overall idea is to welcome those who are spiritually "seeking," and to remove some of the barriers that might hinder them from conversion and participation in the life of the church.

When you're a believer and have been inside the life of the church for as long as many of us have, it's easy to lose touch with life outside the community of faith. You lose a sense of what it's like to hear and experience the gospel for the first time. You forget about what it's like to walk into a place of Christian worship as a stranger to the good news of Jesus and to the fellowship of his people. Incidentally, this is one of the benefits that I and my own family experience whenever we're on vacation and attend church somewhere else. And I'm assuming the same is true for you when you travel and visit another place of worship. Though you already share most of the same basic Christian convictions that the people in that congregation profess, you're sometimes stepping into a space you've never entered before. You're seeing faces you've never seen before. That kind of experience can help reawaken your sense of what it's like to be a stranger, to be a seeker. To be someone who's looking for and open to a presence and a power greater than life lived on your own, with self as your primary goal and purpose.

But in another sense, no matter how many times you've walked through the doors of a church, whether your own or somebody else's, you should always be a seeker. You should never be so at home, on the inside of the gospel and within the community of disciples, that you lose your desire for a deeper knowledge of God and a growing experience of his presence. In today's Scripture passage, the psalmist comes prayerfully into God's presence, not self-satisfied, but rather with a strong sense of lack, and a deep sense of need. "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you" (v. 1a). Notice that the psalmist doesn't just assume God's presence, as if those who occasionally need a spiritual boost can just pop in

and out of God's space, get what they need, and then go about life on their own, relying on their personal power and strength. No, the psalmist shows up hungry and thirsty. He acknowledges that his deepest appetite, and his most desperate thirst, can only be satisfied through reliance on the God who gives life. "My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you" (v. 5).

It's crucial that the psalmist, this seeker of God, comes into the Lord's presence with an open mouth, which serves as a rich symbol of being in relationship with God. In one respect, the open mouth signifies being hungry and thirsty for God. In another respect, the open mouth signifies praise and prayer offered to God. An open mouth indicates openness to God. And openness to God means life. Thus the contrast at the end of the psalm, where the enemies, whose mouths are closed, do not offer praise to God, and thereby experience death. So being a seeker, a seeker of God, makes all the difference. It determines whether you are truly alive, as God intends you to be.

We need to be a church full of seekers. Not just seekers in the sense of folks who are fairly new to the Christian faith, and are open to God's claim on their lives. That's certainly part of it. But also seekers in the sense that we who have been following Jesus for a long time, and have been participants in the life of his people for a long time, need to continually seek the Lord. Otherwise, we don't experience the aliveness that God intends for us and has made possible for us through Christ. If we cease our seeking, or relax in our pursuit of God's presence, we invite a kind of deadening into our souls.

This is part of why worship, individually and corporately, is so important. Without it, we can't be truly alive. When we put ourselves in a posture of praise before God, we're practicing a form of seeking. And this seeking through worship needs to happen daily in our individual lives, as we're scattered into the world, as well as weekly in our congregational gathering. In that sense, every service we have here at Grace Baptist Church is a service for seekers. All of our worship gatherings are for people who recognize that human life depends ultimately on God's faithfulness, and that the appropriate response to that reality is to yield our whole selves to the Lord, entrusting our lives and the future to him.

The psalmist says, "I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." What an extraordinary claim, that nothing matters more than what the Bible calls the "steadfast love" of a forgiving and redeeming God, revealed fully and finally through Jesus Christ. According to the psalmist, knowing this love, and living in the reality of it, is to be desired and sought above all things. In fact, this steadfast love of God is more precious than even life itself. It's the basis for our existence. It's the source of our salvation. It's the reason why we open our mouths to sing, to pray, and to proclaim, not just for a moment, or for an hour on Sunday morning, but for a lifetime. The psalmist says, "I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands" (v. 4).

Sometimes, instead of devoting ourselves to a lifetime of seeking God, we treat God, as one person has suggested, like the Geek Squad. Some of you are probably familiar with them. Geek Squad is comprised of highly skilled and specially trained technicians who are available 24/7 for technical support, as well as installation and repairs on computers, TV and home theaters, appliances, cameras, gaming, mobile devices, and so on. When you need Geek Squad, you call them, they fix your problem, and then they leave you alone. Is it possible, one person asks, that we treat God like we treat Geek Squad? He cites an example from the life of C. S. Lewis, who at a young age discovered that his mother was dying. He remembered how he had been taught that prayers offered in faith would be granted. When his mother eventually died, Lewis prayed for a miracle. He wrote:

I had approached God, or my idea of God, without love, without awe, even without fear. He was, in my mental picture of this miracle, to appear neither as Savior nor as Judge, but merely as a magician; and when he had done what was required of him I supposed he would simply—well, go away. It never crossed my mind that the tremendous contract which I solicited should have any consequence beyond restoring the status quo.¹

The palmist is testifying to a God who is more than just a divine Geek Squad, a being who just comes when we call, fixes whatever problem we're facing, and then goes away so we can continue on without him. No, the God we worship is a God whom we are to seek moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day, even into the night. "On my bed I think of you through the watches of the night," says the psalmist (v. 6). In other words, thinking steadily of God, day and night, is part of what it means to seek God.

During our worship gathering earlier this week, the children in our day care ministry and I played a game where I challenged them to guess what I was thinking. As I expected, they came up with some interesting suggestions about what was in my head. Some guessed that I was thinking about a particular kind of food or a certain animal. Some guessed that I was thinking about the sky or a favorite toy. But their most frequent guess was that I was thinking about God or Jesus. Now, I assume this is because I spend so much time talking to them about God and Jesus, or they simply followed the logic of knowing that I'm a pastor, and this is a church, so God and Jesus must be on my mind a lot.

Truthfully, though God and Jesus are on my mind a lot, I certainly confess that they're still not on my mind as much as they should be. I know that we all have room to grow when it comes to setting our minds more consistently and steadily on God and the things of his kingdom. Remember that the way that your mind dwells upon God influences your feelings and your motives. It shapes your attitudes and your actions. And as we hear in today's text, thinking rightly about God and dwelling upon his faithfulness will lead you into worship. When God is the object of your thoughts, he will also be the object of your praise.

Seeking the Lord requires a certain alertness and vigilance. In fact, the word in verse 1 translated as "seek" originally meant to "to look for dawn." There may even be allusions in this psalm to waiting through the night in the sanctuary for God's help in the morning. It's no surprise, then, that this particular psalm has been used from earliest Christian times as a morning psalm, a way to seek the Lord at the beginning of a new day. It can help us set the course for an entire day of diligently and fervently seeking the Lord, knowing that complacency and satisfaction with the status quo are always near, threatening to diminish our praise and hinder our progress in faith.

Columnist Herb Caen once wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle; when the sun comes up, you'd better be running." And the great preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote likewise, "If you are not seeking the Lord, the Devil is seeking you. If you are not seeking the Lord, judgment is at your heels."² Your presence here this morning tells me that in one way or another, you're a seeker. Seek the Lord. Seek him vigilantly. May the words of the psalmist be your words: "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you."

¹ This comparison is suggested by Van Morris of Mount Washington, Kentucky. Source: C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York:Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 1995) 18-19.

² Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching: From *Leadership Journal*, ed. Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 216.