

REAL TALK

ALTAR

November 28/29, 2020

Psalm 84

Pastor Daniel Hahn

MESSAGE NOTES

The Psalms teach us to express our emotions to God. This is vital to learn. God is not a cold and distant father we must approach with impeccable composure and icy obedience. The Psalms dare us to tell God our deepest needs, longings, resentments, pain, griefs, and joys. And in doing so, we learn to admit the truth about ourselves. In an age in which we often run to distraction, numbing both pain and joy with endless hot takes, retweets, and busyness, the Psalms call us out to the depths — the depths of the human person, the depths of pain and joy, and the depths of knowing God.

— Tish Harrison Warren, *The Psalms Dare Us to Bring Our Whole Selves Before God*, Christianity Today, Nov 9, 2020

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. — Hebrews 4:16

Altar:

1. It's the place of meeting with God (Psalm 84:1 – 2).

I must take care above all that I cultivate communion with Christ ... Our relationship with God and our hunger for that relationship is God's agenda for our lives. He does not require our amazing talent to be laid on the altar. He requires our lives to be the altar. We are never to be content with merely doing things for God. We are central in His will only as we hunger for more of Him. — Calvin Miller, *The Unchained Soul*

2. It's the place where every humble believer finds ultimate acceptance (84:3).

I find no secure place for my soul except in you. And in you, I pray that what is scattered in me may be brought together, so that no part of me may be apart from You. — Augustine, *Confessions*

3. It's the place where we reaffirm the source of our true joy and our inner strength (84:4 – 5).

Jesus beckons me to follow Him to that place of weakness where I risk the vulnerability of a child so that I might know how strong my Father is and how much He loves me. But truth be told, I would rather be an adult. I'd rather be in a place where I can still pull things together if God doesn't show up, where I risk no ultimate humiliation, where I don't have to take the shallow breaths of desperation. And as a result, my experience of my heavenly Father is simply impoverished. — Gary Haugen, *Just Courage*

4. It's the place where we recognize that God can bring good out of even the darkest, driest valleys (84:6 – 7).

... those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. — Isaiah 40:31

5. It's the place where we offer ourselves without reservation, and realize that all we have is pure gift calling for praise (84:8 – 12).



So why did we stop building altars? I honestly wonder if our lives seem more routine than they really are simply because we don't have any altars dotting the landscape. I wonder if many of us feel spiritually lost because we don't have any milestones that help us find our way back to God. We need altars that renew our faith by reminding us of the faithfulness of God. And every once in a while, we need to go back to those sacred places to repent of our sin, renew our covenant with God, and celebrate what God has done.

— Mark Batterson, *Wild Goose Chase*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Can you recall particular times and places where you met God in a uniquely deep and meaningful way?
- Why do you think that God wanted altars built during the Old Testament period?
- Was there anything about last weekend's sermon that stood out to you or encouraged you specifically?
- Once the temple was built in Jerusalem, God instructed the people to come there to meet with Him during certain festivals and feasts. Many Psalms were written as songs to be sung on the journey there. What do you think all of this did for people?
- Since we don't physically build altars or make long pilgrimages any more, what sort of bad pattern could we easily slip into?
- What is it about our present culture that makes it even more challenging to spend focused time with God?
- What is the value of the "physicalness" of a time and place of prayer — maybe walking alone at the beach, kneeling in a private space, or fasting for a day?
- Since we can pray anytime and anywhere, why do you think planning special points of connection with God is essential?
- Going forward from here, how could you be more intentional about "altars" in your life?