

Humming All Day Long

“Run to where you hear the song God gives you.”
Psalm 105:1-5

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Day By Day

Day by day, day by day
O dear Lord, three things I pray:
To see thee more clearly;
Love thee more dearly;
Follow thee more nearly Day by day.¹

I've read of a tribe in east Africa in which the birth date of a child is not counted from the day of his or her physical birth or even from the day of conception. For this tribe, the person's life is considered to have begun when child is first a thought in his or her mother's mind. Aware of her intention to have a child, the mother retreats to sit alone under a tree. There she sits and listens until she can hear the song of the child that she hopes to conceive. Once she has heard the song, she returns to her village and teaches it to the child's father so they can sing it together, inviting the child to join them. After the child is conceived, she sings it to the baby in her womb. She then teaches it to the old women and midwives of the village, so they can sing it throughout her labor. And at the time of the birth the child is greeted with its song. After the birth, all the villagers learn the song of their new member and sing it to the child whenever the child falls or gets hurt. This song becomes a part of the marriage ceremony when the child is grown, and at the end of life, loved ones will gather around the deathbed and sing this song for the last time.

Practicing

I wonder if, in a way, each of us has a song – if I have a song and you have a song that is your song that stays with you from the day you were a burst of creativity in the heart of God to the day you die, but stays with you in the presence of God forever beyond that. I wonder if it's that song that would seem to hum along with the thoughts of anyone who would ever think of you. And if it is true, what would that song be?

What would be the point of your song? Would it be a march to go with you to do battle and expand your territory? Or would it be a waltz that glides with your every move to take you gracefully on a dance through the days of your living? Would it be a

protest song to shout your complaints and demand your rights or the rights of others? Or would it be a symphony with different movements, combining different themes and tempos?

Or, what if your song turned out to be a hymn or song of praise to express love of God; adore the maker of all that is; boast of God's greatness and justice; shudder in ecstasy in God's eternal presence? What if your song were a love song that your life would sing to God?

Day by day...

You might have heard that you're supposed to keep up a spiritual life through a discipline of study and prayer. Our Lenten study uses phrases like *ordinance*, and *developing your life from the inside out*, and *spiritual discipline*.²

All these might sound inviting to you; or it might sound like an imposition: something you've got to do instead of getting to go out to play. It depends on who you are and how you're made.

I recall going to a retreat held for college students by an international campus ministry in which we were told that to be a true Christian we had to get up early enough to have an hour of Bible reading and prayer at 5:00 every morning. We were told we had to submit to the guidance of a spiritual mentor for the next seven years. And I thought, "If that's what I have to do, I don't think I'm going to make it." Getting up before 5:00 in the morning was going to kill me in itself.

Since then I've read the works of a number of spiritual masters, many who had similar things to say. One of them even talked about the sin of having your mind wander while you are at prayer.

You might even be able to hear the crack of a whip. *Pray! Harder!*

And who wants to do that?

I'd almost rather resist.

Yet, we are told to endeavor to stay in love with God. And that makes a lot of sense. The writer of our study said that we need to find a way to be positioned to hear God and be responsive to “*God’s whisper of direction and receive God’s promised presence and power every day and in every situation.*”³ And, I know the desire of my heart. There is something at the core of me that wants that.

The writers and singers of the psalms understood. They knew the necessity of living lives that were filled with praise, in which the songs of our lives could move with the rhythm and melody of the music of God.

The psalm from which our morning’s reading comes is one of those that spoke of it. Psalm 105 is one of the historic psalms that have the purpose of calling the people’s grateful and faithful response to God’s choosing them.⁴

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. It’s like, no matter whether the song of your life is a Celtic jig or punk rock, if you can find a way to point it to God it’s going to give you a connection. It will become a testimony that points to the things that God is doing and show how they reveal God’s character.

Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. It gives us a dimension of life which we can’t get anywhere else. Pretty often I run across people who feel like there just isn’t much of anything to live for any more. Kids have moved out. Retirement has come. Sometimes it’s hard to move and even get out of the house. What else is left?

It’s hard to know what to say to that. The feelings are real, and they don’t reflect the quality of the person’s character. They’re just honest words of despair that sooner or later most all of us could share.

I think, “Could I feel like that some day? And what could I do instead?”

Maybe this is it. *Make your life’s song a love song to God that you can hum all the day long.* Practice it, and it might even get you through the tough stuff whenever it comes along.

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has don, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered. And there it comes.

You get to share God's strength by putting yourself at God's service.

Day by day.

Moment by moment.

And it doesn't come by the crack of a whip.

Some of the spiritual masters might have found 5:00 A.M. a good time. Not everybody does. Some of the spiritual masters might have found solitude with a candle lit and the pages of Bibles, books, and journal pages open. Not everybody does.

But everybody has their place; just like they have their song. It's in that place that you're likely to hear your own song and the song of God; and you'll hear how it is that the two songs have a way of coming together to create a harmony you won't want to get out of your head.

It might be in the morning at home over a cup of coffee when the sun sends its rays through the window and the fresh brew of coffee fills the room. It could be at a table in the evening when all is quiet and it's just you and a CD playing, soft, a favorite song that touches your soul. It might be the Bible that sits open to the Word you are dwelling with.

Then again, it might be as you're standing on the shore of the big lake or the ocean, waves reaching gently, playfully at your feet as you drink the fresh, cool air.

And there you'll hear it:

your song and God's song together.

And you'll want to hum it all the day long.

Meeting God

I was alone. Thousands of feet above the valley and the trailhead on which I first set out. Up, up the slope I kept on. Snow fields beside me, now the trees were far below. The trail was traversing along a steep slope of scree that reached to the craggy summit still above me. One foot methodically setting its sole in front of the other: a determined climb when my energy and strength were almost spent. I was determined to press on.

I talked to myself: where is it, now? Isn't this the time and the place you have come expecting *something*? The North Cascades? The Washington wilderness? Where, now is the voice of God you expected to sense? And there was silence except for the moving air strumming my ear against the beat of my quick pulse.

I reached the point where I was, maybe 30 feet below the summit; and unwilling to risk a fall on a solo scramble up the crags to the very top so very far from anyone else, this is where I stopped. I mounted my camera on a rock and took my own picture. Broke out a squished sandwich and an apple I could hardly eat. Drank some water and marveled at what I saw.

I'm not certain I heard any song at first.

I looked at the ridges towering above Lake Chelan to the southwest, where the forest fire had been burning for over a week. It was sending a column of smoke to the troposphere where it formed its own cumulonimbus cloud, a thunderhead isolated in a broad, blue sky. I scanned the ridges from there, clockwise along the snow-capped summits: ridges stacked as far as I could see.

I kept watching as I made my descent. Smiling. Watching the column of smoke and the sculpted mountains of a splendid world made by the very fingers of God.

And it seemed to come to me – this tune that found its way into a hymn of praise.

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze;
then sings my soul, my savior God to thee,
how great thou art, how great thou art.
Then sings my soul, my savior God to thee,
how great thou art, how great thou art.⁵

And the power of the presence overwhelmed me: this awesome, forgiving,
redeeming Presence of God I know in Jesus.

That's one of the places I need to go.

And wherever you need to go:

Run!

Run there whenever you can.

Day by day. day by day
O dear Lord three things I pray:
To see thee more clearly;
Love thee more dearly;
Follow thee more nearly
Day by day...Day by day by day by day by day...

¹ "Day by Day," Words by Richard of Chichester (1197-1253); music by Stephen Schwartz. © 1971 Quartet Music, Inc., Range Road Music, Inc. and New Cadenza Music Corporation.

² Ruben Job, Three Simple Rules. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press © 2007. pp 53-54.

³ Ibid. p 55

⁴ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms," The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, vol. IV. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press © 1996.

⁵ Stuart K. Cline, "How Great Thou Art," The United Methodist Hymnal. Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House © 1989 p 77. Song written by Cline 1953.