

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday August 15, 2021. "Dear God: Honest Prayers to a God Who Listens. Find Beauty in Everything."

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're halfway through 2021 and fully committed to gathering in person. A growing group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's, youth areas and coffee spot have been fully open also and we're seeing a good response. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Recap.

We're in our second Sunday of the series following the spiritual journey of an influencer and author Bunmi Laditan, (watch the message online to see how to pronounce her name), and her book; **"Dear God: Honest Prayers to a God Who Listens."** On this spiritual search, we discovered the first step begins with honesty about where we are spiritually and our understanding of and relationship with God. If we cannot be totally honest where we're struggling then there is little chance in making headway in our search for him. We have to be comfortable that our faith and understanding of God will come in spurts and slides, and we give ourselves grace on that journey. Then last week we talked about finding God in those difficulties in life, and how we can grow in those moments. Those are tough lessons, but looking back those moments are always pivotal in shaping who we are. And that's why seeking God during difficult times is so essential to our spiritual journey.

III Sunday.

Sunday, we revisited a topic we've hit before. And that's finding beauty in our world, and then in those beautiful moments and places finding God. It began with Bunmi's prayer thanking God for really simple, everyday, but beautiful things she just noticed in her life. So there were two premises set forward about the nature of beauty, or the beauty of nature, (sorry...couldn't help myself), that should help move us towards God. One, beauty is everywhere. Wherever you look, if you notice, you can find things that would lead you to want to seek a higher power. Two, there has to be a response to beautiful things. You can't just experience something amazing and then go back to your everyday routine like nothing happened. You are changed because of that experience, and so it requires some form of response. Either a search within, or an actual physical response to changing your life.

So, have you ever experienced something so amazing, beautiful that it changed who you are? How was your life different, and do you still carry the experience with you today?

The scripture was the ever so familiar **Psalm 23**. But it was seen not solely through the eyes of how God cares for us, even though that is an essential truth in this passage. It was unpacked in what specific ways David experienced the world around him that opened him up to the true nature of God. So, read the **23rd Psalm** and reflect on it a bit.

What jumped out to you from this song about the beauty that points to God?

Using your imagination, paint a scenario of what David might have been experiencing and how this experience reinforced his relationship with God.

Kal said there were a few things that this psalm paints as 'beautiful' that can help us seek God.

1. Beauty of the world. This psalm tells us there are things that, if we allow ourselves to be led to them, will point to God. ***"Green meadows, and peaceful streams."*** David was an outdoor guy. This is where he met God. Romans tells us that God has scattered beauty that points to him everywhere.

So, where are those places for you?

2. Beauty of presence. There is something about proximity that breeds and grows closeness. The best thing about pets is they know how to read you and then just sit next to you and show you affection...and then sometimes bite you. Just being together. This is why we're struggling so much during COVID to figure out what connection and community looks like. We need to experience the fullness of being together. We dry up inside when we don't.

What does it look like for you to be in the presence of others?

3. Beauty of loving care. The final thing we see in this passage is the beauty of compassion. Actions like; people giving up their shoes and coats to a person who is homeless, an officer making a relationship with some young kid, a teacher giving extra attention to a troubled student and more. Nothing shines beauty like sacrificially caring for someone. Verbs of loving care from this psalm; ***"You are close, protect, comfort, prepare, honor."*** That's a powerful description of loving care that radiates beauty. And it's within those acts you experience the fullness of God.

Where have you seen or participated in some act of loving care where you experienced God?

IV Challenge.

A reminder. The purpose of this series is to find practical, everyday ways that we can seek and find God. And Psalm 23 reminds us that it's in those darkest valleys, those most difficult times in our lives, that we can find God if we: mindfully notice the world around us, intentionally create moments to experience the presence of others and be open to the presence of God, and to look and participate in acts of loving care. This isn't just in the valleys, but just in everyday life.

Bunmi showed us that in her heartfelt prayer thanking God for the simple things in life. And David reminded us in one of his songs that he experienced the comforting presence of God if he just opened himself up to noticing the things around him.

Which brings us to the obvious question. **What are things you could incorporate into your regular life that would help you see and experience God in a deeper way?**

It's this question of believing, and hoping that leads us to genuine seeking.